NATION
Worms seen in packaged curd on Vande Bharat
≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS
Freight surge, LPG crisis hit exports from East India
≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS
IOC bans trans women from Olympics
≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 27 MARCH 2026 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 7 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 75 | Pages: 8

Iran allows India, China, Pak access to Hormuz

Iran says strait will be open for 5 nations including Russia

TEHRAN/NEW DELHI, MANGALURU, 26 MARCH

Iran has allowed India and several "friendly nations", including China and Russia, to use the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz for commercial shipping, even as it effectively restricts access to adversaries amid ongoing conflict in West Asia.

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said ships from India, China, Russia, Iraq, and Pakistan would be permitted transit, while those linked to hostile nations would be barred. "We are in a state of war… there is no reason to allow the ships of our enemies," he said.

A senior Foreign Ministry official told that oil tankers bound for Bangladesh are allowed to cross Hormuz.

The partial blockade of the narrow shipping lane — which handles nearly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG supplies — has triggered a surge in global energy prices. For India, heavily reliant on West Asian energy imports, the disruption raises concerns over fuel and fertiliser security. New Delhi has stepped up diplomatic efforts to ensure the uninterrupted flow of supplies.

Araghchi also ruled out negotiations with the United States, saying Iran's position remained "principled and firm" despite outreach from regional leaders.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-27

IRAN PLANS SHIPPING FEES IN HORMUZ

Iran's parliament is working on legislation to formalise fees on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz, effectively turning it into a "de facto toll route". Lawmaker Mohammadreza Rezaei Kouchi said the proposal aims to codify Iran's control over the strait while generating revenue.

RELIANCE DENIES IRANIAN CRUDE PURCHASES

Reliance Industries on Thursday dismissed reports that it had bought Iranian-origin crude, calling them "baseless" and misleading.

The company said it sources oil from multiple global suppliers, including Russia and countries in the Middle East, to operate its Jamnagar refining complex.

LPG TANKER REACHES MANGALURU PORT

In Karnataka, the New Mangalore Port Authority marked a milestone with the arrival of its 40,000th vessel, MT Apollo Ocean.

The tanker docked on Thursday carrying 16,000 tonnes of LPG.

—PTI

>>>More on Pgs 4, 5, 6 & 7

People queue with empty LPG cylinders for refills amid an ongoing supply crunch at Jayamahal Palace in Bengaluru on Thursday —MOHAMMED ASAD

Have 60 days of fuel stocks: Govt

India has about 60 days of oil stock cover and has arranged one full month of LPG supply, the government said on Thursday, adding that there is no shortage of petrol, diesel, or LPG, calling reports of shortages as a "deliberate misinformation campaign" aimed at triggering panic buying. Amid reports of panic buying and long queues at petrol pumps and LPG distributors, government, , released stock details of crude oil, fuels and LPG as it rushed to calm nerves. —PTI

Indian killed in UAE

An Indian national was among two people killed in Abu Dhabi on Thursday by debris from a missile interception, the Jordanian foreign ministry said. A Pakistani also died, while three others, including a Jordanian, were injured. Jordan condemned the incident, describing it as an Iranian attack, according to the ministry's communique.

Smoke and flames billow after a private travel bus collided with a tipper and caught fire in Andhra's Markapuram on Thursday —PTI

14 burnt to death as bus collides with tipper in Andhra

RAYAVARAM, 26 MARCH

At least 13 people were burnt to death and 22 injured when a private bus collided with a tipper in Markapuram district on Thursday, top officials said. The accident occurred between 5.30 am and 6 am near Rayavaram village on the road to Podili. The bus rammed into the tipper carrying concrete chips, hitting its fuel tank and triggering a massive fire.

Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha said the bus, belonging to Harikrishna Travels, had 41 passengers on board, all 13 deceased dying in the blaze. The vehicle, en route from Jagtiyal in Telangana to Kaligiri in Nellore district, was licensed and insured until December 2026.

Markapuram in-charge SP V Harshavardhan Raju said preliminary investigations suggest the bus veered into the wrong lane. The collision impacted the tipper's diesel tank and the bus battery, contributing to the fatalities. Five victims died at the front, and eight at the rear. Three injured are in critical condition. The driver's claim that the steering wheel got stuck is being probed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the families of each deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured from the PMNRF. Andhra Pradesh CM Naidu and Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy expressed shock, with Naidu directing officials to provide prompt medical care and compensation.

Andhra Pradesh has witnessed four major bus accidents in six months, claiming at least 45 lives, including 33 who were charred in previous accidents in Chinna Tekuru and Rayavaram villages. —PTI

>>>More on Page 4

Fertilisers cost rises in India amid Iran war

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Shipping disruptions in West Asia and rising input costs are pressuring global fertiliser production and prices, but India is managing the impact through close government-industry coordination, said Suresh Kumar Chaudhari, Director General of the Fertiliser Association of India. Conflict involving the US, Israel, and Iran has disrupted shipments via the Strait of Hormuz. Despite global volatility, availability remains adequate. Crisil reports potential 10-15 per cent impact on domestic fertiliser output, higher working capital needs, and a possible Rs 20,000–25,000 crore rise in government subsidy expenditure. —ANI

B'luru prof proposes to student inside classroom

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

A professor at a medical college in Nelamangala allegedly proposed to a student inside a classroom leading to him being beaten with slippers by the student and her classmates. He has been booked on charges of sexual harassment, police said. The complainant said the accused, an assistant professor in the Microbiology Department, had been sexually harassing female students. The college asked the professor to appear for an inquiry and restraining him from entering the campus, it said. —PTI

MORE ON PAGE 2

4 VIP tickets must be given to MLAs: Speaker to K'taka govt

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader on Thursday asked the government to ensure that every MLA receives four VIP tickets at the City's Chinnaswamy Stadium during IPL matches.

The Speaker issued the direction after MLAs across party lines, including Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka, claimed they were given just one ticket and were not provided proper seating facilities during matches. Some members also demanded a separate lounge for legislators at the stadium, and alleged that they were treated with "disrespect" by the KSCA, which manages the venue.

The development comes as defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru are scheduled to take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2026 opener in Bengaluru on 28 March. Matches had been stopped at the stadium after 11 people were killed in a stampede during RCB's victory celebrations last June.

Khader asked Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to call KSCA officials and ensure that MLAs are provided respectful seating arrangements. "One ticket is given per MLA, and VIP tickets are issued only if the MLA attends in person. However, MLAs find it difficult to stand in queues as staff do not recognise them, leading to a sense of disrespect," he said. "Many MLAs, therefore, avoid attending matches."

The issue arose when MLAa were discussing a new sports arena if the Jakkur Flying Training School is relocated. —PTI

>>>More on Page 2

FIR AGAINST X FOR AI VIDEO OF PM, ECI

T'PURAM, 26 MARCH

Kerala police cyber wing registered a case against social media platform X and one of its handles for circulating an AI video (in pic) that allegedly depicts the Prime Minister and Election Commission of India (ECI) in a misleading and defamatory manner. The video pertains to an EC letter bearing the BJP Kerala unit's seal, which sparked political controversy in the poll-bound state. Police said that the video remains up on the X handle.

The content was flagged through official channels, including the ECI, as it was believed to have the potential to mislead the public, undermine constitutional bodies, and disrupt free and fair elections. A case has been registered against the X account Laxmi N Raju (@valiant_Raju), X Corp, and others at the Cyber Crime Police Station, Thiruvananthapuram City, with investigations underway.

The 1.17 minute video was posted with intent to incite riots, and despite authorities' instructions, X allowed its circulation. Legal notices were issued to the platform under relevant laws for removal of the content. The row arose after CPI(M) highlighted the issue of an affidavit bearing the BJP Kerala seal instead of the official ECI seal, which the EC described as a clerical error that was rectified immediately. —PTI

AI flight back to Delhi due to snag after 7 hrs in air

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

An Air India A350 aircraft enroute to London Heathrow returned to Delhi on Thursday afternoon after a technicalissue. The aircraft, which had been airborne for nearly seven hours, faced the problem following a previous incident on 15 March, when the same aircraft, VT-JRF, operating from New York to Delhi, was diverted to Shannon, Ireland.

An Air India spokesperson stated that flight AI111, from Delhi to London, made a precautionary return to Delhi due to a suspected technical issue. The aircraft landed safely, and extensive technical evaluations are underway, which will take additional time. Sources reported noises heard onboard, prompting the diversion. The airline expressed regret for the inconvenience to passengers and assured efforts are being made to resume their journey to London swiftly.

The number of passengers onboard has not been disclosed. The aircraft had been in the air for about four hours before the decision to divert was made when it was in Saudi Arabian airspace. Total flight time before landing back in Delhi was approximately seven hours. The flight departed Delhi around 6am and returned at approximately 12.30pm. Air India began operating A350-900 aircraft from January 2024. — —PTI

Karnataka eases age norm for Class 1 admissions by 60 days

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

The Karnataka government on Thursday announced a 60-day relaxation in the age eligibility criteria for class 1 admissions for the 2026-27 academic year, following demands from parents. Children who turn six by 1 August 2026 will now be eligible, instead of the original 1 June cut-off.

School Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangarappa made the announcement in the Legislative Assembly, noting that the decision aims to provide relief to parents whose children narrowly missed the prescribed age limit. "There has been a demand from parents to relax the six-year age eligibility norm for admission to class 1. They have also submitted a memorandum to me," he said.

The relaxation will also apply to LKG and UKG admissions. Since these are currently outside a formal regulatory system, the government plans to introduce a regulatory Act or rules in the next session to provide a permanent framework. Admission software will be updated to reflect the changes.

The move applies to State Board schools. CBSE and ICSE schools generally follow national board guidelines, requiring children to be six by 31 March or 1 June, and are not affected by the state's relaxation. —PTI

34 candidates in fray for Bagalkot, and Davangere South bypolls

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

As many as 34 candidates are in the fray for the Bagalkot and Davanagere South Assembly bypolls, the Karnataka CEO's office said. In Bagalkot, 26 nominations were filed, 14 validated, and after five withdrawals, nine candidates remain. Davanagere South received 45 nominations, 36 were accepted, and 25 candidates are now contesting.

The bypolls follow the deaths of sitting Congress MLAs HY Meti (Bagalkot) and Shamanur Shivashankarappa (Davanagere South). Congress has fielded Umesh Meti in Bagalkot and Samarth Shamanur in Davanagere South, while the BJP has nominated Veerabhadrayya Charantimath and Srinivas T Dasakariyappa respectively.

Election authorities have intensified expenditure monitoring, seizing over Rs 80 lakh in cash and liquor, registering 53 FIRs, and initiating multiple cases under the Karnataka Excise Act. Illicit inducements worth over Rs 408 crore meant to influence voters in four states have been seized in the past month, the Election Commission said.

Congress has fielded Umesh Meti in Bagalkot and Samarth Shamanur in Davanagere South —SALAR

CONG EXPELS REBEL

The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) expelled H Subhan Saab, Labour Wing District President, Davanagere DCC, for six years. Saab is contesting Davanagere South bypoll as a rebel and made derogatory statements against the party, violating discipline. KPCC Working President GC Chandrashekhar said the action was necessary to uphold party unity and principles. —Salar News

CAUTIONS LAWYERS

SC flags 'menace' of AI-generated fake judgments

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Supreme Court has voiced concern over the growing "menace" of litigants and lawyers citing non-existent judgements generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

Justices Rajesh Bindal and Vijay Bishnoi said the practice is becoming rampant across India and throughout the world.

The observations were made by the apex court while expunging remarks made by the Bombay High Court on a plea filed by the director of a company.

"This menace is rampant in all courts now, not only in India but throughout the world," the bench said.

The high court had noted in its order that the submissions of the appellant were generated using generative AI chatbot— ChatGPT— including a judgement which had no citation in the real world.

"The respondent filed written submissions in February 2025 and April 2025. From the overall tenor of the written submissions and a few giveaway features like green-box tick-marks, bullet point marks, repetitive submissions etc, this court strongly feels that the submissions were prepared using a generative AI tool like ChatGPT.

"A strong pointer is seen from a reference made to one alleged case 'Jyoti w/o Dinesh Tulsiani Vs. Elegant Associates'.

The respondent neither gave the citation nor a copy of the judgement. This wasted judicial time," the High Court had said. — PTI

—AI

GAIL to invest Rs 130M in 4 states for bioenergy

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

GAIL (India) Limited has announced a Rs 130 million investment to acquire a 49 per cent stake in Leafiniti Bioenergy Private Limited, a subsidiary of TruAlt Bioenergy Limited. TruAlt will retain a 51 per cent stake. The joint venture aims to establish multiple greenfield Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants across Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Odisha, beginning with six plants each producing 12 tonnes daily. This will generate 23,976 tonnes of CBG annually, alongside 97,902 tonnes of Fermented Organic Manure and 470,862 tonnes of Liquid Fermented Organic Manure yearly. The projects are expected to create 820-1,225 jobs, displace 19,800 tonnes of fossil fuels, and reduce methane emissions by 9,300 tonnes annually. —*ANI*

Man slits wife's throat on road in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 26 MARCH

A 28-year-old woman was allegedly murdered by her husband on a road in Kalaburagi district in the State. The victim, Saanvi from Maharashtra, was attacked by her husband, Akshay, following a family dispute. Videos recorded by locals show the accused attacking her publicly. The incident occurred near Ballurgi village in Afzalpur taluk, where Akshay reportedly brought his wife in a car, forced her onto the road, and slit her throat. Saanvi, heard screaming in the videos, died instantly. The accused fled the scene. Afzalpur police are working to arrest him. —*PTI*

Uttara Kannada reality actor killed in crash

UTTARA KANNADA, 26 MARCH

Bhavateesh Ghadi, a popular reality show actor from Uttara Kannada, died in a road accident near Yellapur. The incident occurred when Bhavateesh, riding a motorcycle at high speed, collided with a passenger bus, causing the motorcycle to catch fire. Eyewitnesses say he lost control before crashing into the bus's front right light. The bus driver and conductor managed to extinguish the flames but could not save Bhavateesh, who was declared dead at a local hospital. Bhavateesh gained fame on the Kannada reality show "Halli Haida Pyatege Banda" and belonged to the Siddi community. Police Sub-Inspector Siddappa Gudi registered the case. Bhavateesh's talent and popularity made his death a significant loss. —*SALAR NEWS*

Interstate burglars held with jewellery worth Rs 27 lakh

BIDAR, 26 MARCH

Kamalnagar police arrested three interstate thieves involved in a theft case, seizing jewellery worth over Rs 27 lakh. The accused broke into a house near APMC market in Kamalnagar on 9 March, stealing Rs 28.32 lakh worth of gold ornaments and Rs 1 lakh cash. District Police Superintendent Pradeep Gunti said the police solved the case using AI-enabled CCTV cameras. —*SALAR NEWS*

CLASSIFIED

CLOSING DOWN SALE
RAYMOND DISCOUNT SHOP
PICK ANY ITEM Rs. 500/- only
2 Nos. Raymond T/W Pant Pc
2 Nos. Raymond Shirt Pc
Raymond Pant Pc + Shirt Pc
COMBO GIFT BOX
RAYMOND 3Pc SUIT Length Rs.1000/-
AT NEW M.N. Next to K.F.C
DISPENSARY Rd. OFF COMMERCIAL
BANGALORE -1 Mob: 9343 03 7218

Jakkur row leads to IPL tickets for MLAs

Cong, BJP MLAs say they are willing to pay for tickets, but KSCA must be taught a lesson

Preparations underway at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru ahead of the 19th Edition of the IPL, on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

When Minister KJ George, intervening in a debate on Bengaluru's development in the Assembly, said he had earlier suggested considering a new sports arena or stadium if the Jakkur Flying Training School—a heritage aviation institution—is relocated from its current site, the conversation ended up with MLAs getting more tickets for matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

George said on Thursday that the proposal was opposed within the Cabinet by Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, citing criticism that the government was attempting to favour builders. The CM (Siddaramaiah) subsequently decided to put the matter on hold, and no decision was taken.

Reacting to this, senior BJP MLA CN Ashwath Narayan asked whether there was a shortage of land for a new cricket stadium in Bengaluru, noting that cricket has become commercialised and associations generate substantial revenue. "Do they need government land? They only need government permissions."

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka interjected, saying: "They (KSCA) do not give us tickets properly during matches, yet the government wants to provide them land for a stadium."

Pointing out that land for the Chinnaswamy Stadium was originally allotted to KSCA for training purposes, he said, "They have crores of rupees, yet they treat us in a way that we have to plead even for tickets. Even when a ticket is issued, it is in my name, so I cannot send my wife or son."

At this point, several Congress MLAs, including Vijayananda Kashappanavar and others, said Ashoka was right and that MLAs should be given more tickets, proper seating, and preferably a separate lounge.

"MLAs get only one ticket and are made to sit in a lower gallery; earlier, they used to get two tickets. Our families also want to watch matches. Should they not get that opportunity? Ensure proper tickets, seating, and a separate lounge for MLAs," Kashappanavar said.

Ashoka said the government had allotted 16.32 acres of land for the stadium at a nominal rent of Rs 1,600 per month, while ticket prices range between Rs 2,000 and Rs 3,000 for a match.

"Teach them (KSCA) a lesson. We are not asking for free tickets; we are willing to pay," he added.

At this point, Speaker UT Khader intervened and directed Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to speak to Karnataka State Cricket Association members.

"I know the President (Venkatesh Prasad) personally. I am also a voting member of the KSCA. There is nothing wrong with MLAs asking for this; they have every right to request the benefit. I will speak to them," he said.

Meanwhile, Ashoka questioned why KSCA, which is permitted to host matches, has been granted a licence to serve liquor, including a CL-4 licence (for clubs), at the stadium. "Tighten these rules; only then will KSCA fall in line," he stated. —*PTI*

BENGALURU TRAFFIC POLICE ISSUES ADVISORY AHEAD OF IPL MATCHES

The Bengaluru Traffic Police on Thursday issued an advisory on restrictions and elaborate arrangements made to ensure the smooth flow of vehicular movement ahead of the IPL matches scheduled for 28 March and 5 April at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Parking prohibited at: Queens Road, MG Road, Cubbon Road, St Mark's Road, Museum Road, Kasturba Road, Lavelle Road, Vittal Mallya Road, and stretches within Cubbon Park, among others.

Designated parking facilities at: St Joseph's Indian High School Ground, St Joseph's European School Ground, Freedom Park multi-level parking, Garuda Mall, Shivajinagar Bus Stand (first floor), and UB City parking space.

Cab-auto pick up points: BRV Ground and Manekshaw Parade Ground, with drop-offs at Gate-6 and Gate-3.

Metro timings extended: Final departures are: Whitefield (Kadugodi) 12.30 am; Challaghatta, Silk Institute and Madavara 12.45 am, Bommasandra 1.00 am, and RV Road at 2.00 am. The last train from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station (Majestic) towards all four directions will depart at 1.30 am.

Free Metro tickets: QR codes on IPL tickets allow fans two-way travel on Namma Metro.

GOVT TO RECLAIM JARAKABANDE, PEENYA FOREST FROM IAF

BENGALURU, 26 MAR

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre on Thursday informed the Assembly that 452 acres and 4.5 guntas of forest land allotted to the IAF at Jarakabande Kaval in Bengaluru North taluk in 1987 had been cancelled in 2017, and steps would be taken to reclaim additional forest land still under its control.

Replying to a discussion raised under Rule 69 by LoP R Ashoka, he said that apart from the cancelled extent, another 83 acres of forest land in Jarakabande and Peenya plantation areas remain with the Air Force.

"Steps will be taken to clear this encroachment," he said. Also, 58.08 acres of the excess land had been handed over to the BMRCL in "violation of law", he said.

"This money should also come to the Forest Department," Khandre said.

He stated that the area used for the annual air show at Gantiganahalli in Yelahanka hobli, measuring 159 acres and 29 guntas, is also reserved forest land.

On sandalwood policy, Khandre said the government is simplifying regulations to ease cultivation and trade, but sandalwood will not be classified as a plantation crop. —*PTI*

MUDA case: HC issues notice to CM, wife, ED & Lokayukta

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

The Karnataka High Court on Thursday ordered serving notices to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his wife Parvathi BM in connection with the closure report filed by the Lokayukta police in the MUDA site (plot) allotment case.

The court also sought a response from the Lokayukta police and the Enforcement Directorate on the B-Report (Closure report).

Justice S Sunil Dutt Yadav ordered the notices when the court was hearing a plea filed by activist Snehamayi Krishna challenging the B-Report filed by the Lokayukta police.

The case stems from allegations that the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) had allotted compensatory sites to Parvathi in an upscale value with higher property value than the location of the land that had been acquired.

However, the Karnataka Lokayukta police, which registered the case against Siddaramaiah, Parvathi, and the Chief Minister's brother-in-law, later gave them a clean chit in the closure report, which was admitted by the Special Court to try Public Representatives on 28 January. —*PTI*

RUSH FOR LPG

People wait in a lines to get refilled LPG cylinders on Thursday across Bengaluru, as residents fear that the West Asia war could lead to supply shortages — *MOHAMMED ASAD*

RAM NAVAMI CELEBRATIONS

Children dress as Sita and Ram to celebrate the Ram Navami festival at a temple in Rajajinagar, Bengaluru, on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Mysuru police unearth used cars racket

MYSURU, 26 MARCH

The Mysuru district police have uncovered a unique used-car fraud in which a fruit-seller, a car mechanic and a car dealer, teamed up to cheat gullible buyers by selling vehicles without proper documents.

SP Mallikarjun Baladand said the Mysuru Police cracked eight cases and is continuing the investigation.

Police arrested fruit seller Rhumman Sharief of Ghosianagar, car dealer Mujaheed Pasha of Rajeevnagar and mechanic Shahabuddin in this case. Police have recovered 8 luxury cars worth Rs 1.10 crore from them.

Police said that accused used to cheat gullible buyers by releasing advertisements about the sale of luxury cars like Audi, and Polo cars through their Facebook pages indicating lowt prices.

They cheated the buyers without providing them RC book, insurance and other documents of the cars after collecting the money from them.

Mallikarjuna said the accused were buying luxury cars from Bengaluru and other places and selling them in Mysuru. Police collected details of customers from them.

A police team led by Additional Superintendent of Police L Nagesh, Deputy Superintendent of Police DS Raghu, Bannur Inspector Satish, PSI Sudarshan, and others busted the racket. —*Salar News*

THRASHED WITH SLIPPERS

Prof 'proposes' to student in class, beaten

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

A professor at a medical college in Nelamangala allegedly proposed to a student inside a classroom leading to him being beaten with slippers by the student and her classmates.

He has been booked on charges of sexual harassment, police said.

The complainant said the accused, an assistant professor in the Microbiology Department, had been sexually harassing female students.

The college asked the professor to appear for an inquiry and restraining him from entering the campus, it said.

The incident occurred on 23 March, but came to light on Thursday after a videos went viral.

The assistant professor in the Microbiology Department at a Nelamangala college was beaten by the student who he claimed to be in love with him —*SCREENGRAB*

In a video the professor is heard telling the student, "You said 'I love you' to me." The woman denies the claim, responding, "I have not said it."

The footage shows the professor saying, "I would like to propose to the most important woman in our batch," before naming the student. She immediately questioned him.

The video then cuts to the woman saying, "If you want to speak, you can go to the principal. The entire batch will come with you."

Professor: "How come you proposed to me?"

Student: "When did I propose?"

Professor: "Didn't you say 'I love you'?"

Student: "Excuse me? When did I propose?"

Professor: "There is CCTV."

The professor also instructed someone in the class to distribute the chocolates before he left the class, amid the uproar.

Moments later, the situation escalated as the student, along with her classmates, assaulted the professor with slippers outside the class.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

Kolar DC slams officials over poor drinking water

KOLAR, 26 MARCH

Kolar Deputy Commissioner Ravi MR has expressed his displeasure over functioning of some revenue authorities in handling the drinking water issue in the district. He warmed erring officials of strict action against them under the provisions of Disaster Management Act if they fail to properly address the issue.

Speaking at the Disaster Management meeting held on Thursday, he criticised delays in ensuring drinking water supply and maintaining basic infrastructure.

He noted that out of 144 units in Srinivaspur, only 19 are functioning and wondered as to what the authorities are doing to provide relief to people in rural parts.

In villages where water contamination has been reported, officials should take steps to put up warning boards and identify alternative borewells to provide safe drinking water to thirsty people, he said.

As the summer has already set in, dependence on private water tankers is expected to rise. To prevent exploitation of the public, he instructed officials to fix uniform rates across the district.

—*Salar News*

PM calls for meet with CMs amid Iran war crisis

PM to bat for 'Team India' approach as LPG shortage mounts

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday will interact with chief ministers of all states, excluding those going to polls, to review preparedness in the wake of the West Asia conflict, sources said.

The meeting, aimed at fostering a "Team India" approach, is the first of its kind addressing the conflict, which began on 28 February with US-Israel attacks on Iran, prompting retaliatory strikes across the region.

Election-bound states will not participate due to the Model Code of Conduct, but the Cabinet Secretariat will hold separate talks with their chief secretaries, including those of Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, and Puducherry. The PM emphasised that India is moving forward confidently, confronting challenges head-on.

The conflict has intensified domestic pressures, with states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh seeing restaurant chains and hotels halt operations or switch to induction stoves amid critical commercial LPG shortages. Manufacturing activity has slowed to a 4.5-year low, affecting fertiliser, aluminium, and semiconductor sectors. Kerala, heavily reliant on Gulf remittances, braces for economic strain as over 10 million Indians face job insecurity or evacuation.

The DMK criticised the Centre over the shortage and foreign policy handling.

Narendra Modi —*PTI*

Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi questioned the Union government's response and accused AIADMK of ignoring public interest. He highlighted steps by Chief Minister MK Stalin, including an emergency meeting and letters to the PM, and warned that BJP negligence had worsened the crisis.

In Maharashtra, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis flagged a 70 per cent surge in Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertiliser sales, attributing it to panic buying. He warned against hoarding and reassured citizens that fuel and essential supplies are sufficient, urging people to remain calm. —*PTI*

TO TAKE ON DMK

AIADMK begins campaign in TN

CHENNAI, 26 MARCH

With a month to go for Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, the AIADMK camp is making apparent efforts to get a head-start ahead of the ruling DMK bloc by quickly finalising the seat-sharing deal, identifying constituencies for itself and allies and switching on to the campaign mode.

The Edappadi K Palaniswami-led AIADMK, which leads the NDA in Tamil Nadu will take on the DMK in certain urban centres considered to be the ruling party's stronghold.

The Assembly polls will be held on 23 April 23 and counting of votes taken up on 4 May.

Determined to win over 210 out of the 234 Assembly constituencies in the state, the AIADMK has announced that it would contest from 169 seats, leaving the rest to allies.

DMK has announced that 'Rising Sun' will be in fray from 175 Assembly segments, indicating it would include smaller allies that would face the polls under the ruling party's poll symbol. The party aims to secure over 200 seats.

The AIADMK would take on the DMK in about 13 out of the 16 constituencies in Chennai. It has also announced its first list of candidates. While Seeman-led Naam Tamilar Katchi is in the fray in all the constituencies, actor-politician Vijay is gearing up to announce his TVK party candidates for 234 seats in the high-stakes poll battle. The AIADMK-led NDA has the BJP, which will contest from 27 seats. PMK will fight from 18 seats, AMMK from 11, TMC (M) from five (on BJP's Lotus symbol). AIADMK has apportioned 65 seats to its allies. —*PTI*

Stalin expresses concern over Sonia's ill health

CHENNAI, 26 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin expressed his concern on Thursday about the hospitalisation of Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi. In a social media post, Stalin said: "Concerned to hear that Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Madam Tmt Sonia Gandhi has been admitted to the hospital... Wishing her a speedy and complete recovery." Admitted to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi NCR on Tuesday, Gandhi remains stable and was admitted in a precautionary measure while undergoing treatment for a systemic infection. Doctors treating Gandhi confirmed that Delhi's seasonal conditions have also triggered a mild flare-up of the leader's bronchial asthma.—*PTI*

Cop backs CPI(M) candidate on social media, suspended

T'PURAM, 26 MARCH

A Civil Police Officer was suspended for allegedly posting social media messages supporting an LDF candidate in Vamanapuram ahead of Kerala's Assembly polls in April, officials said on Thursday. The suspended officer has been identified as Vaishakan from Pangode police station. According to police, he allegedly shared messages on social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups, seeking support for CPI(M) candidate DK Muraleedharan Nair in Vamanapuram, which is in violation of service rules. Congress activists filed a complaint with the Thiruvananthapuram Rural Police Chief, who ordered a preliminary probe. Following the inquiry, the officer was suspended as part of disciplinary action pending a probe.—*PTI*

SDPI withdraws Manjeshwar candidate in Kerala

KASARAGOD, 26 MARCH

The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) withdrew candidate Ashraf KM from the Manjeshwar Assembly constituency on Thursday. Following a morning meeting of state leaders at Uppala, Ashraf withdrew his nomination, which the Party claimed was to support parties fighting BJP. Ashraf was contesting against BJP former state president K Surendran and IUML's AKM Ashraf. Party sources said Ashraf's candidacy was withdrawn because his presence could affect other secular parties contesting against the BJP in the constituency. SDPI state secretary Ansari Enath said decisions on where a party should contest and what political line it should adopt are internal matters.—*PTI*

— *PTI*

Manoj Tiwary snubbed by TMC, approached by BJP

KOLKATA, 26 MARCH

Snubbed from the ruling Trinamool Congress candidate list for the 2026 West Bengal assembly elections, former India cricketer and state minister Manoj Tiwary said he has received an offer from the BJP but is yet to take a call on his political future, saying "time will tell". Tiwary, the sitting MLA from Shibpur and minister of state for sports, was denied renomination as the TMC opted for Dr Rana Chatterjee as its candidate from the constituency. Incidentally, while dropping Tiwary, the TMC has handed over a ticket to former Bengal pacer Shib Shankar Paul from the Tufanganj constituency. Speaking to the media for the first time after the TMC snub, Tiwary did not hide his disappointment at being dropped. —*PTI*

ANTI-NAXAL OPS LAUNCHED AS DEADLINE NEARS

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Security forces deployed in the anti-Naxal grid have launched a mega operation to neutralise the remaining armed Maoist cadres with less than a week remaining for deadline of 31 March to end left wing extremism in the country.

Official sources said that the Centre is also preparing an "operations and development" blueprint which is expected to include an announcement of withdrawal of about five Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) battalions from these regions and the launch of welfare schemes.

About three to four CoBRA units of the CRPF are being moved from Chhattisgarh to Jharkhand to undertake a special operation in the Saranda forests of West Singhbhum district.

Similarly, teams of the CRPF, BSF and ITBP are being "re-located" in Chhattisgarh's Bastar area to force Maoists to surrender.

The sources indicated that a cross-border operation involving Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Odisha is also in the works.

Security forces are still tracking around 130-150 armed Maoists and two members of the banned outfit. — *PTI*

'WHY THE RUSH ON WOMEN'S QUOTA LAW?'

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday asking why the government is in a "big hurry" to amend the women's quota law.

In his letter to Rijiju, Kharge also reiterated that an all-party meeting should be called on the matter after the current round of assembly elections is completed in April.

Kharge's letter came in response to one from the Union minister to the Congress chief seeking a meeting with the party on plans to amend the Nari Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, for its implementation.

"I fail to understand why the government is in a hurry to amend a Constitutional Amendment Act, just 30 months after it was passed. We are busy with the election campaign. That is the reason why we had suggested that the meeting be held after the campaign is over," Kharge said. This will not affect the implementation of the amended Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. — *PTI*

Ram Navami is show of strength for WB BJP

KOLKATA, 26 MARCH

Ram Navami in West Bengal on Thursday unfolded into a political contest over Hindu symbolism, with the BJP foregrounding its Hindutva plank and the ruling TMC also celebrating the festival to prevent the saffron camp from monopolising the religious narrative during the high-stakes assembly poll campaign.

Across Kolkata and several districts, saffron flags fluttered, chants of "Jai Shri Ram" echoed, and hundreds of processions moved through neighbourhoods, turning a once limited celebration into a politically charged event.

More than 60 rallies were scheduled in the city, alongside events in Howrah, Hooghly, Birbhum and Uttar Dinajpur, with heavy security deployment.

Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari joined a procession in Bhabanipur.

"Ram Navami is a celebration of our civilisation and culture. People across Bengal are coming out in large numbers to show their devotion," he said. —*PTI*

Artistes perform during a religious procession to mark the 'Ram Navami' festival in Kolkata in West Bengal on Thursday—*PTI*

30L names have been added to voters' list: Didi

DUBRAJPUR, 26 MARCH

Mamata Banerjee on Thursday claimed it would be her party's credit if around 30 lakh of the over 60 lakh names under adjudication appear on the voters' list.

Addressing an election rally in Dubrajpur in Birbhum district of West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress supremo asserted that the TMC will ensure legal recourse for all those whose names were deleted.

"It is to our credit if 29 to 30 lakh of the over 60 lakh names under adjudication find themselves in the list... It is because of our campaign and fight that these names would be on the list. But I want 100 per cent names to appear on the list as they are all genuine voters," she said.

The Election Commission of India released the first supplementary list of 'Under Adjudication' voters on Monday, without disclosing deletion figures. 32 lakh cases have been disposed of, while 28 lakh remain. —*PTI*

Only BJP can deliver justice: RG Kar victim's mom

KOLKATA, 26 MARCH

The parents of the RG Kar Hospital rape and murder victim have backed the BJP in poll-bound West Bengal, saying only a regime change can ensure justice and women's safety.

Ratna Debnath, the victim's mother, has been fielded by the BJP from Panihati in North 24 Parganas. Nearly a year-and-a-half after the August 2024 crime in Kolkata, which sparked nationwide protests, the family said political change is essential. "Only the BJP can ensure justice for my daughter and provide safety and security to the women of the state," the father said.

"We had been saying from the beginning that we would not allow anyone to indulge in politics with our child's death. But what did the Left do other than just protest?" he said, adding they would campaign together. —*PTI*

890 candidates in fray for Kerala Assembly polls

T'PURAM, 26 MARCH

The Kerala Assembly polls scheduled on April 9 will see 890 candidates from various political parties seeking the mandate of the over 2.7 crore voters in the state, according to ECI figures.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) said that of the 2,125 nominations received by it, 890 candidates remain in the fray.

There were 957 candidates in the 2021 Assembly polls in the state. Koduvally constituency in Kozhikode district has the highest number of candidates at 13.

There are 2,71,42,952 voters in the state, including those overseas, and they will cast their ballot at 30,471 polling stations across Kerala. Of these, 1,38,84,001 are women and 1,30,16,593 are men, with the 40-49 age group having the highest number of voters at 56,32,036.

The figures also showed that there are 273 third gender and 2,44,927 disabled voters in the state.

CM WRITES TO EC OVER BJP 'SEAL' ROW

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday wrote to the chief electoral officer, condemning the action initiated against those who reacted to the 'BJP seal' issue.

The controversy pertains to a communication issued by the Election Commission to political parties in Kerala that allegedly bore the BJP's office seal.

Vijayan said that in a democratic country as long as such criticism does not cross the limits of decency or become defamatory or personal, it should be treated as freedom of expression. —*PTI*

IUML leader suspended over 'sexist' remark

ALAPPUZHA, 26 MARCH

The Indian Union Muslim League has suspended its leader A Irshad over alleged derogatory remarks against CPI(M) MLA U Prathibha during an election campaign in Kayamkulam.

Irshad allegedly said she was "selling" her eloquence and beauty to secure a third consecutive win and accused her of failing people. Party leaders confirmed his suspension and removal as constituency chairman, with H Basheer given additional charge.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan condemned the comments as "misogynistic and insulting." The CPI(M) will file complaints. — *PTI*

M'RASHTRA MINISTER'S VIRAL VIDEO WITH TRANSWOMAN STIRS ROW

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Maharashtra minister Narhari Zirwal has landed in a controversy after his video with a transperson surfaced on social media. The opposition Congress has demanded the NCP leader's sacking over his "unethical behaviour."

The Congress alleged that the video shows Zirwal, who is the Minister of Food and Drug Administration, in a compromising position with the transperson at his official residence.

The Congress condemned the incident saying it shows the moral decline in Maharashtra's politics.

Despite repeated attempts, Zirwal could not be contacted for his comment.

A tribal leader, Zirwal represents the Dindori Assembly constituency in Nashik district.

Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar attributed the surfacing of the video to the tussle between the ruling allies.

"This is nothing but a war within the government in which the ruling parties are trying to finish each other. Same is the th leadcase with (arrested self-styled godman) Ashok Kharat, who exploited many women," he said.

He said that as per the available information, Zirwal was with a transperson and the latter's brother allegedly made the video viral as part of a blackmail attempt. — *PTI*

EXCEEDED TOTAL DONATIONS OF 10 PARTIES

BJP got highest donations in 2024-25: ADR

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Donations to national parties surged by 161 per cent in 2024-25, with the ruling BJP accounting for the overwhelming majority, a report by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said.

The report said total donations above Rs 20,000 declared by the national parties stood at Rs 6,648.563 crore from 11,343 contributions in FY25. Of this, the BJP alone received Rs 6,074.015 crore from 5,522 donations, followed by the Congress with Rs 517.394 crore from 2,501 donations.

The BJP's declared donations exceeded the combined total of the Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and the National People's Party (NPEP) for the same period by more than tenfold.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), meanwhile, declared that it did not receive any donations above Rs 20,000.

Overall donations to national parties rose by Rs 4,104.285 crore in 2024-25 as compared to 2023-24. The BJP's collections alone jumped 171 per cent from Rs 2,243.947 crore in the previous fiscal. Donations to the Congress increased by 84 per cent, from Rs 281.48 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 517.394 crore in 2024-25.

Among other parties, the AAP received Rs 27.044 crore -- a 244 per cent increase -- the NPEP got Rs 1.943 crore, an increase of 1,313 per cent, the report said.

Corporate donations accounted for Rs 6128.787 crore of the total contributions, across 3,244 donations. Individual donors contributed Rs 505.66 crore.

- Total donations above Rs 20,000 declared by the national parties stood at Rs 6,648.563 crore from 11,343 contributions in FY25.

The BJP received Rs 5,717.167 crore from 2,794 corporate donations and Rs 345.94 crore from 2,627 individual donors.

The Congress received Rs 383.86 crore through 112 corporate donations and Rs 132.39 crore from 2,357 individual contributors. —*PTI*

Jaishankar flies to France for G7 amid West Asia war

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday travelled to France for the G7 foreign ministers' meeting, focusing on the West Asia crisis and ensuring the Strait of Hormuz remains open for shipping.

While India is not a G7 member, it was invited as a partner by France, the chair.

Ministers from the US, Canada, Germany, Italy, France, Japan and the UK are attending. He will visit Abbaye des-Vaux-de-Cernay on March 26 and 27 for sessions with partners, an official statement said.

He will hold bilateral talks on the sidelines. Besides India, France invited Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Brazil.

S Jaishankar with France Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot in France on Thursday —*PTI*

A French official said a session will address the crisis and explore negotiation channels for de-escalation and reopening maritime routes, and how to "tackle the nuclear and ballistic programme of Iran". Oil and gas prices have surged after Iran blocked the Strait. —*PTI*

— PTI

Six Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh

KANKER, 26 MARCH

Six Naxalites surrendered in Kanker district over the past two days, a senior official announced. Five Maoist cadres from the Rajnandgaon-Kanker border division and one from military company number 5 turned themselves in and decided to join the mainstream, said Superintendent of Police Nikhil Rakhecha. The surrendering individuals included ACM Mangesh Podiyami, Ganesh VK, Mangti Jurri, Hidme Markam, Raje, and PPCM Swaroopa Usendi, who handed over three weapons, including an SLR and two .303 rifles. Authorities are working to contact other active cadres, encouraging them to surrender. Over 2,700 Maoists have joined the mainstream in 26 months under the rehabilitation policy. —*PTI*

Case filed after 1,000 stray dogs killed in T'gana

HYDERABAD, 26 MARCH

A case has been registered against unidentified individuals following the alleged killing of stray dogs in Nizamabad city, police announced. Animal welfare activist A Goutham, who is the Cruelty Prevention Manager with the Stray Animal Foundation of India, stated that for months, stray dogs were targeted within Nizamabad Municipal Corporation limits. He claimed that on 23 March, some persons used poisonous injections to kill dogs, transporting their carcasses in a vehicle. He said that about 1,000 dogs had been killed months. A case has been filed under BNS and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. —*PTI*

— ANI

22,808 poultry birds culled in Ch'garh amid flu

BILASPUR, 26 MARCH

Authorities have culled 22,808 poultry birds following an avian influenza outbreak at a government farm in Bilaspur district, officials confirmed. About 25,896 eggs and nearly 79 quintals of poultry feed were also destroyed to contain the virus. The outbreak was detected at a farm in Koni, where between 19 and 24 March, approximately 4,400 chickens died. The animal husbandry department responded swiftly, forming a rapid response team under the joint director, veterinary services. The district has been declared an infected zone within a one-kilometre radius, with a ten-kilometre surveillance zone established. No human cases have been reported so far. —*PTI*

Veteran actor director EA Rajendran dies

KOLLAM, 26 MARCH

Veteran actor and director EA Rajendran died in Pattathanam, Kerala, aged 71, after months of treatment, said film sources. The funeral will be held in his native Thrithallur, Thrissur, on Friday. Rajendran was the brother-in-law of actor Mukesh and son-in-law of noted theatre director O Madhavan. After marrying Sandhya, his wife, they settled in Pattathanam. An alumnus of the National School of Drama and FTII, he started as a theatre artist and debuted in film with 'Greeshman' in 1981, acting in over 50 films. His last film was 'Oru Perumkaliyattam' in 2023. He is survived by his wife and son, and his death was condoled by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. —*PTI*

'India has 60 days of fuel, no shortage'

Centre asks public to avoid panic buying, rumour mongers warned of consequences

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

India has around about 60 India has about 60 days of oil stock cover and one month of LPG supply, the government said on Thursday, dismissing reports of shortages as "deliberate misinformation" aimed at triggering panic buying.

Amid long queues at petrol pumps and LPG distributors, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas released stock details for the first time since the West Asia conflict, stressing that petrol, diesel, and LPG supplies are stable. State-owned oil companies, including IOC, BPCL, and HPCL, confirmed normal operations across the country, with no rationing of fuels.

The ministry said all petrol pumps are adequately stocked and credit for outlets has been raised to three days to prevent shortages caused by working capital issues. Despite disruptions in supply from the Strait of Hormuz, India has secured alternative crude for the next 60 days and refinery output is above 100 per cent. LPG imports have been supplemented with 800,000 tonnes of cargo from multiple countries, ensuring a full month's supply. Domestic LPG production has been increased to 50,000 tonnes per day, covering over 60 per cent of national requirements and reducing import needs to 30,000 tonnes daily.

Regarding natural gas, India produces 92 million standard cubic metres per day of its 191 mmscmd requirement, making it far less import-dependent than LPG. The government clarified that piped natural gas is promoted as a convenient alternative, not due to LPG shortages.

The ministry warned that misleading social media posts were creating unnecessary anxiety and said action would be taken against those responsible, reaffirming that all 1 lakh-plus fuel outlets remain operational without interruption. —*PTI*

A worker aranges LPG cylinders at a distribution centre amid the LPG supply crunch at Shivajinagar in Bengaluru on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Centre hikes gas allocation to Rajasthan

The Centre has increased the allocation of commercial gas to Rajasthan by 10 per cent, officials said on Thursday. The state had requested the Centre for additional gas. Chief Minister Bhajanlal thanked Prime Minister Modi for this decision. Officials said there is no shortage of fuel in the state. —*PTI*

Dead UP man's kin demands govt job

The family of a 26-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh, who was killed in a missile attack in Riyadh, has demanded compensation and a government job for his widow. The mortal remains of Ravi Gopal were brought back to his Baghain village from Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. Villagers gathered to bid farewell to Gopal, who had been working as a driver in the Saudi capital. He is survived by his wife, parents and a four-year-old son. His wife Ritu remains inconsolable, family members said. Dayal said the family needs help and has sought a government job for Gopal's wife. —*PTI*

TRUCKERS MAY REJECT NEW CONTRACTS

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

The All India Transporters' Welfare Association (AITWA) has warned of widespread operational disruptions impacting India's road transport sector.

The crisis is driven by diesel shortages, rising DEF costs, reduced cargo volumes, supply chain uncertainties, and shortages of workshop inputs, leading to increased idle times and costs. Transporters have invoked force majeure to seek a temporary halt on long-term freight contracts until at least 30 April, urging shipments to move on mutually agreed spot market rates and calling for immediate clearance of overdue payments.

Mr Abhishek A Gupta, AITWA's General Secretary, described the situation as "comparable to a Covid-like disruption," emphasising the need for collective support to maintain supply chains.

The sector faces a complex mix of shocks, with fuel shortages, reduced cargo, and delayed repairs eroding margins, prompting the association to insist on measures to prevent wider supply chain failures. — Agencies

J&K: Rumours fuel panic buying

SRINAGAR, 26 MARCH

Petrol pumps Kashmir saw panic buying on Thursday as rumours of shortage spread, although authorities assured that sufficient quantities were available, officials said.

People made a beeline to fuel stations in Srinagar and other parts of the Valley with their vehicles, cans and bottles.

Many fuel stations were shut and were turning away people, saying that their pumps had run dry.

In many places, people had to wait for hours altogether to fill up their vehicles.

A petrol pump owner in Ganderbal district said people were "unnecessarily creating panic" and resorting to panic buying, forcing many fuel stations to call it a day.

The authorities have urged the people to remain calm and avoid panic buying.

"Sufficient LPG and petroleum products are available. It is being replenished regularly," said Kashmir Divisional Commissioner Anshul Garg.

Garg warned of action against individuals who spread misinformation or attempt to create panic.

The Chhattisgarh government has capped the supply of commercial LPG cylinders at 20 per cent of previous month's consumption, while directing time-bound online refill booking for domestic consumers, officials said on Thursday.

Priority would be given for LPG supply to educational institutions, hospitals, military camps, jails, hotels, social welfare institutions, railway and airport canteens, government offices, guest houses, animal feed units, and restaurants. — *PTI*

Flames swallow a private bus at Rayavaram in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday morning. —*PTI*

Bus fire survivors recall chaos, fear

RAYAVARAM, 26 MARCH

Darkness, smoke, fire, heat, confusion, and being knocked off seats while asleep were among the experiences endured by survivors of the bus accident in Markapuram district on Thursday, which claimed 13 lives and injured several others.

Most of the deceased were charred to death, and 22 people were injured after a private bus rammed into a dumper truck near Rayavaram village.

The dumper fell to its right and the front portion of the bus broke off as both vehicles were engulfed in flames.

Completely burnt bodies lay on the road. The rib cage of one body was visible, indicating the severity of the blaze.

A woman lying on a hospital bed said a boy travelling with their group of three had said, "Pinni (aunty), we will die after the accident."

"There were three of us. Two of us are alive, but there is no trace of the boy," she told a Telugu channel.

She said the bus was travelling at high speed, and she was seated in the fifth row from the rear.

A young survivor, undergoing treatment for burns, said he was unaware of what had happened.

Another man, who appeared unscathed, said the accident occurred at around 5.30 am, forcing him and another person to break open a window to escape.

A woman who survived was sobbing in hospital. A man who had occupied the first seat said he had inhaled a lot of smoke and struggled to breathe.

At the time of the accident, he said passengers were trampling over each other in a desperate attempt to escape.

Another man, who was checking his phone at the time of the accident, said most people were asleep. — *PTI*

UK court rejected Nirav's plea amid India's assurance

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The London High Court relied on the "quality of assurances" given by the Government of India in its note verbale while rejecting fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi's petition to reopen his case against extradition, officials said.

Modi, who is wanted in India in connection with a Rs 13,000-crore Punjab National Bank fraud, had approached the London court to reopen his case on the basis of the judgment in fugitive economic offender Sanjay Bhandari's case, where extradition was dropped on the possibility of torture by Indian agencies.

The London High Court had discharged Bhandari from the extradition order on human rights grounds.

"Refusing" permission to reopen Modi's case, Lord Justice Stuart Smith and Justice Jay in the High Court of Justice, King's Bench Division, said they relied on "the quality of assurances" given by the Indian government in its note verbale.

"When Mr Modi's case came before us in 2022, the material underpinning the decision in Bhandari was either not available or was not drawn to our attention. This court's judgment in the Bhandari case presents a worrying picture of the use of proscribed treatment to obtain confessions," the UK court said in its judgment.

"Were it not for the statements made and assurances given by the GoI between September 2025 and February 2026, culminating in the note verbale to which we accord considerable weight, we would have reopened this appeal in the exercise of exceptional power," the court held.

The Bench rejected the argument that there was a "real risk of torture or other ill-treatment" during the journey from prison to the trial court in Mumbai.

The court said it has considered the assurances very carefully. — *PTI*

3-Judge SC Bench to hear pleas on UP Gangsters Act

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Supreme Court has ordered the clubbing of all petitions challenging the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986 for adjudication by a three-judge bench. The law was enacted to combat organised crime in Uttar Pradesh.

Senior advocate Shoeb Alam, representing the petitioners, addressed concerns regarding the overlapping of cases across different benches.

He said that while a coordinate bench comprising justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan is currently examining Section 111 of the BNS, which deals with organised crime, the present plea challenged the provisions of the UP Gangsters Act. — *PTI*

Worms seen in packaged curd on Vande Bharat

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Railways has scrapped the contract of a vendor after a passenger found worms in the packaged curd served to him on the Patna-Tatanagar Vande Bharat Express and imposed a fine of Rs 50 lakh on the company. The Railways also imposed a fine of Rs 10 lakh on its own company IRCTC.

On 15 March, seven passengers aboard the Vande Bharat were served packaged curd. Upon opening one of the packets, they found worms and insects inside. The passenger, Ritesh Singh, immediately flagged the issue on X, tagging the IRCTC, the Railway Minister and others.

The IRCTC found the curd packet was purchased from Patna, with a manufacturing date of 9 March 2026 and an expiry date of 7 April 2026.

The vendor, Krishna Enterprises, was fined Rs 25,000 and warned. Dissatisfied with the IRCTC action, the Railway Ministry on Wednesday directed it to terminate the contract of Krishna Enterprises and enhance the fine to Rs 50 lakh. The ministry also imposed a fine of Rs 10 lakh on IRCTC. — *PTI*

The Railways also imposed a fine of Rs 10 lakh on its own company IRCTC for mishandling the situtaion —*PTI*

BASED ON LT. GEN DHILLON'S BOOK

Bhushan, Agnihotri to make movie on 'Operation Sindoor'

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Bhushan Kumar and Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri on Thursday announced their new film 'Operation Sindoor,' which, they said, is based on the codename of India's strikes on the terror infrastructure in Pakistan and PoK after the Pahalgam terror attack.

The film will be based on the book 'Operation Sindoor: The Untold Story of India's Deep Strikes Inside Pakistan' by Lieutenant Gen KJS 'Tiny' Dhillon (Retd).

The film makers called the film a cinematic response to the tragic massacre of innocent civilians, most of them tourists, in Pahalgam in 2025, in which 26 people were killed.

Director-producer Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri added, "This is not just a film. It is a revelation. Through Operation Sindoor, India has not just taken avenged the Pahalgam terror attack, but it has also demonstrated its military-might. — *PTI*

Bhushan Kumar and Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri — *PTI*

'Pics of Ranveer smoking in turban are fabricated'

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Filmmaker Aditya Dhar on Thursday said the images of Ranveer Singh's character smoking while wearing a turban were fabricated. He also warned that such manipulations will be "dealt with firmly."

The filmmaker, who is basking in the glory of the film's massive success on the big screen, said he is indebted for the overwhelming love that "Dhurandhar: The Revenge," the second part of his espionage saga received from audiences across the country and the world.

The filmmaker's statement comes after a police complaint was filed against the makers and the actor for the image which shows Ranveer Singh's character smoking while wearing a turban.

Dhar said he wanted to state "unequivocally" that he has the highest respect for the Sikh community.

The violence and action in "Dhurandhar: The Revenge" is rooted in emotional drama and influenced by the brutal realities of the criminal world, says action director Aejaz Gulab, who was given a "free hand" by director Aditya Dhar to design these sequences.

Aejaz said he spent 135 days filming action sequences in "Dhurandhar," preceded by 70 days of intensive prep. — *PTI*

M'rashtra funded temple linked to arrested 'godman'

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

The Maharashtra government approved over Rs 1 crore in 2018 for development works at a Nashik temple associated with Ashok Kharat, now under arrest for rape, official documents reveal. The funds were sanctioned under the regional tourism development scheme, then headed by BJP leader Jaykumar Rawal.

Kharat was detained on March 18 after a woman accused him of rape over three years.

The temple, Shri Ishanyeshwar Devasthan, received the highest allocation among four projects from Nashik district, with Rs 25 lakh disbursed in 2017-18.

A SIT is probing Kharat, and six criminal cases have been registered against him. — *PTI*

WHITE HOUSE GETS A ROBOT

US First Lady Melania Trump was escorted by a black-and-white humanoid AI robot at a global summit at the White House, where it greeted guests in 11 languages, including Bengali. Created by robotics company Figure, the robot, named Figure 3, was introduced as the 'first American-made humanoid guest in the White House' to a gathering of First Spouses from 45 countries. The robot waved and delivered greetings in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, French, Arabic and Japanese, saying 'Swagatam' in Bengali. It is designed as an autonomous household assistant capable of tasks such as cleaning and organising —*SCREENGRAB*

Women continue to lag in Kerala's poll politics

Kerala has 1,39,21,868 female voters, compared to 1,32,20,811 male voters —*PTI*

The promise of greater political space for women, amplified after the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, appears distant in Kerala's 9 April Assembly elections, where candidate lists reflect a familiar pattern of underrepresentation.

Despite women accounting for more than half of the electorate in the state, their presence in the electoral fray remains limited, underscoring a persistent gap between participation and representation.

The optimism that followed the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam in Parliament in 2023 had raised expectations among women leaders across party lines. President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent to the Bill in September that year. Although its implementation is scheduled for a later date, many had hoped that political parties would voluntarily increase women's representation in the current electoral cycle. However, the candidate lists released by major parties suggest otherwise.

Across Kerala's 140 constituencies, the numbers remain modest. The CPI(M) has fielded 12 women candidates, the Congress nine, the BJP 14 and the CPI five. Notably, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a key ally in the opposition United Democratic Front (UDF), has fielded two women candidates for the first time in its history.

Congress MLA and candidate PC Vishnunath said the party leadership had made sincere efforts to improve women's representation this time. However, he acknowledged the limitations.

"In my personal opinion, capable women leaders should get electoral representation even without the support of any reservation or Act. But unfortunately, it does not happen every time, as leadership considers various factors, including winnability," he said.

The issue has also triggered political exchanges. While the BJP has highlighted the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam as evidence of the Modi government's commitment to women, the CPI(M) has questioned the timing of renewed discussions around the law, alleging that it is aimed at influencing voters ahead of Assembly elections in several states.

Senior CPI(M) leader and All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) national secretary P K Sreemathi expressed disappointment over the limited number of seats allocated to women across parties. She noted that while the CPI(M) had fielded 12 women and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) a total of 18, the numbers remain insufficient.

"This is not at all enough. We have been making strong interventions to increase women's representation, but we usually end up with only this much when candidate lists are finalised," she said. At the same time, she maintained that the situation within the CPI(M) and the LDF is comparatively better than in other parties.

Sreemathi also questioned the Centre's decision to highlight the Act at a time when it is yet to be implemented. "If it is not going to be enforced now, why raise it at this stage? It appears to be aimed at influencing women voters in poll-bound states," she alleged.

Congress Rajya Sabha MP and Kerala Mahila Congress president Jebi Mather emphasised the importance of reservation in ensuring women's participation. She pointed out that in local self-government elections in Kerala, women's representation has reached as high as 54 per cent due to reservation policies. "Without reservation, achieving such levels of participation would be nearly impossible. That is the reality," she said. Mather also expressed uncertainty about when the Centre would implement the Nari Shakti Vandan Act, criticising what she described as a focus on "headline management". However, she declined to comment on the relatively low number of seats allotted to women by her own party.

From the BJP's side, Kasaragod district president and Assembly candidate M L Ashwini defended her party's record, stating that the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) provide reasonable representation to women in both elections and leadership roles.

She cited the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam as a key example of the government's pro-women stance, contrasting it with what she described as the inaction of the previous Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Ashwini also noted that five district presidents of the BJP in Kerala are women.

Political analysts argue that the issue goes beyond party politics. Noted analyst G Gopakumar said that despite sustained demands for greater representation, there is little evidence of political parties creating adequate space for women in candidate lists.

"The continued patriarchy within political leadership highlights the need for reservation in Parliament and state legislatures. We cannot expect an organic transformation from party leadership alone," he said. In this context, he argued, the Constitutional Amendment providing for 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies — already approved by the President — has become an urgent necessity.

Historical data reinforces the concern. Since the formation of the Kerala Assembly in 1957, women's representation has never crossed the 10 per cent mark, reflecting a long-standing structural imbalance.—*PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Meta's invincibility cracks as it is held liable for child harm

For years, parents, teenagers, paediatricians, educators and whistleblowers have warned that social media can harm young people's mental health, contributing to addiction, eating disorders, sexual exploitation and even suicide. This week, for the first time, juries in two US states sided with those concerns, marking a potentially pivotal moment in the growing backlash against Big Tech.

In Los Angeles, a jury found Meta and YouTube liable for harms caused to children using their platforms. Meanwhile, in New Mexico, a separate jury concluded that Meta knowingly harmed children's mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its services.

The rulings were welcomed by tech watchdog groups, families and child advocates. Sacha Haworth, executive director of the Tech Oversight Project, described the verdicts as a turning point. After years of what she called "gaslighting" by major technology firms, she said, new evidence and testimony had validated concerns long raised by young people and their parents.

While it remains unclear whether these decisions will trigger immediate changes in how platforms operate, they signal a broader shift in public sentiment. Increasingly, juries and the public appear willing to hold technology companies accountable for the harms associated with their products. Legal experts believe this could lead to a wave of further lawsuits and, ultimately, stronger regulation.

For years, social media companies have argued that harms linked to their platforms are unintended side effects — the result of wider societal issues or bad actors exploiting safeguards. They have also downplayed research suggesting a direct link between social media use and psychological harm.

During testimony in the Los Angeles case, Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg appeared to reject the idea that addictive design plays a role in user engagement. When asked whether people tend to use products more if they are addictive, he responded: "I'm not sure what to say to that. I don't think that applies here."

The verdicts suggest that such arguments may no longer carry the same weight. However, whether companies will respond meaningfully remains uncertain. Both Meta and Google have said they disagree with the decisions and are considering legal options, including appeals.

Arturo Bejar, a former Meta engineering director who previously raised internal concerns about Instagram's impact on users, said jury trials can help "level the playing field" when confronting trillion-dollar firms. However, he stressed that lasting change will likely require regulatory intervention.

"One thing that I saw working inside the company that effectively led to behaviour change was when an attorney general or the Federal Trade Commission stepped in and required things of the company," he said. He added that authorities involved in these cases now have a significant opportunity to demand meaningful reforms.

Although both lawsuits centred on harms to children, they differed in approach. The New Mexico case was brought by the state's attorney general in 2023. Investigators posed as children on social media platforms, documenting sexual solicitations and Meta's responses. The jury was asked to determine whether the company had violated consumer protection laws.

The Los Angeles case, by contrast, involved a single plaintiff, identified only as KGM, who filed claims against Meta, YouTube, TikTok and Snap. TikTok and Snap settled before the trial began. The remaining case focused on allegations that platform design features were deliberately engineered to be addictive, particularly for younger users.

This distinction proved significant. By focusing on product design rather than user-generated content, the lawsuits avoided the legal protections of Section 230, a US law that generally shields internet companies from liability for content posted by users. Previous lawsuits that targeted content distribution often failed on these grounds.

Legal scholars say this shift in strategy could reshape the industry. By treating social media platforms as products whose design can cause harm, courts may open the door to new forms of accountability.

The Los Angeles case is one of several "bellwether" trials — test cases selected from thousands of similar lawsuits to gauge how arguments perform before a jury. These cases could eventually lead to large-scale settlements, similar to those seen in litigation involving tobacco companies and opioid manufacturers.

Even as the legal battles continue, broader public attitudes appear to be changing. A 2025 Pew Research Center poll found that 48 per cent of teenagers believe social media harms people their age, up from 32 per cent in 2022.

Yet even as scrutiny intensifies around social media, experts warn that new technologies are already emerging as the next challenge. Artificial intelligence chatbots, in particular, are raising fresh questions about safety and regulation.

As Sarah Kreps, director of Cornell University's Tech Policy Institute, noted, addressing today's harms does not guarantee protection against those of tomorrow. New platforms and technologies will continue to appear and users will inevitably gravitate towards them. —*PTI*

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg argued that Meta does not aim to maximise 'time spent' on its apps —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Southeast Asia turns to nuclear power for AI data centres amid war

Several nations in the region are reviving long-shelved nuclear plans and setting ambitious targets. If realised, nearly half of Southeast Asia could have nuclear power in operation by the 2030s —*PTI*

Nuclear power is getting a renewed look across Southeast Asia as countries scramble to meet surging energy demand driven by artificial intelligence (AI) data centres, while geopolitical tensions expose the fragility of fossil fuel supplies.

Several nations in the region are reviving long-shelved nuclear plans and setting ambitious targets. If realised, nearly half of Southeast Asia could have nuclear power in operation by the 2030s. Even countries without firm commitments have begun signalling interest.

Despite decades of ambition, Southeast Asia has never produced nuclear energy. That could soon change as governments face mounting pressure to cut emissions while sustaining rapid economic growth and rising electricity demand.

The ongoing conflict involving Iran has sharpened concerns about energy security. The resulting surge in crude oil prices has highlighted the vulnerability of Asia's dependence on imported fossil fuels, prompting renewed urgency to diversify energy sources.

"The ongoing conflict in the West Asia demonstrates how volatile fossil fuel costs are," said Alvie Asuncion-Astronomo of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute. "Nuclear is an alternative solution that can give us more self-reliance in terms of energy."

Energy demand in Southeast Asia is expected to grow rapidly. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates the region will account for a quarter of global demand growth by 2035. A key driver is the rapid expansion of data centres, particularly those supporting AI.

According to the think tank Ember, more than 2,000 data centres are already operating across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, with many more planned. These facilities are highly energy-intensive, with a single AI-focused data centre consuming as much electricity as 1,00,000 households.

Malaysia illustrates the scale of the challenge. Positioning itself as a regional hub for AI computing, it has attracted investment from major technology companies such as Microsoft, Google and Nvidia. The country already hosts more than 500 data centres, with hundreds more under construction or in the pipeline.

"A lot more industries are expanding in Malaysia," said Zayana Zaikariah of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies. "Everything requires energy," she added, pointing to growth in data centres, semiconductors and mining.

In response, Malaysia revived its nuclear programme last year and set a target to bring atomic energy online by 2031. The move aligns with a broader global trend. Nearly 40 countries, including the United States, Japan, South Korea and China, have committed to tripling nuclear capacity by 2050.

Industry estimates suggest Southeast Asia could contribute nearly a quarter of the nuclear capacity expected from new entrant countries by mid-century. "There is a more serious, growing momentum for nuclear development in Southeast Asia," said King Lee of the World Nuclear Association.

Five members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines — are actively pursuing nuclear energy.

Vietnam is advancing plans to build two nuclear power plants with support from Russia's state nuclear corporation, Rosatom. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has described them as "nationally significant, strategic projects", backed by a revised atomic energy law that came into effect in January.

Indonesia has incorporated nuclear energy into its national strategy, aiming to build two small modular reactors by 2034. Officials say countries including Canada and Russia have already submitted cooperation proposals.

Thailand has set a target of adding 600 megawatts of nuclear capacity by 2037, describing it as a "promising solution" to meet rising demand for affordable and clean electricity.

The Philippines, which built a nuclear plant in the 1970s but never activated it, is once again moving forward. A new regulatory authority was established last year, and the government has set a 2032 target for nuclear energy deployment, alongside a roadmap to attract investors.

"We are not anticipating that nuclear electricity will be cheap at the outset," Asuncion-Astronomo said. "But in the long term, it will improve reliability, security and costs."

Other countries are also exploring options. Cambodia's national strategy has signalled openness to nuclear energy, while Singapore has begun studying its potential. Even Brunei, a major oil and gas producer, has indicated it is "carefully exploring" nuclear power.

The renewed interest is closely tied to the rise of AI-driven infrastructure. Data centres, often vast windowless buildings filled with servers, require enormous and continuous electricity supply. Their rapid expansion is straining existing energy systems and forcing governments to consider new baseload power sources.

However, nuclear power remains controversial. Concerns over safety, radioactive waste and high upfront costs persist. Public opposition intensified after disasters such as the 1986 Chernobyl meltdown and the 2011 Fukushima accident.

Although countries like Japan are now restarting reactors, scepticism remains. Bridget Woodman of Zero Carbon Analytics warned that nuclear energy may appear more attractive as climate goals slip further out of reach, but it is not without risks.

Countries "considering starting a nuclear industry from scratch" must carefully weigh "the possibility of accidents", she said.

Globally, more than 400 reactors across about 30 countries currently generate roughly 380 gigawatts of electricity, accounting for between 4.5 and 10 per cent of total energy supply, according to international estimates.

If governments meet their targets, global nuclear capacity could more than triple to around 1,446 gigawatts by 2050. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

UK to restart arresting Palestine Action supporters

LONDON, 26 MARCH

London's Metropolitan Police have announced that it will one again restart arresting protesters supporting the banned group Palestine Action. The force initially indicated it would limit arrests after a High Court ruling in February declared the government's ban under anti-terror legislation was unlawful. However, as the ban remains during the Home Office's appeal process, the Met has revised its approach. Deputy Assistant Commissioner James Harman stated, "It is still a criminal offence to support Palestine Action. We must enforce the law as it is at the time, not as it might be at a future date." The High Court last month ruled that Palestine Action's activities did not meet the threshold to be classified as a terrorist organisation.—*AGENCIES*

24 killed as bus plunges into river in Bangladesh

DHAKA, 26 MARCH

At least 24 people are confirmed dead and several remain missing after a bus fell into the Padma River in Bangladesh. The accident happened in Rajbari at the Dauladia terminal at around 5.15pm on Wednesday when the bus was attempting to board a ferry. The bus was believed to carry about 40 passengers, mostly returning from Eid holidays. Fire officials recovered 24 bodies, including 11 women, six men, and five children, from inside the bus. Divers retrieved two women in their 50s or 60s before salvaging the bus, which was lifted from the river around midnight. Search efforts continue with military and police help, and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has ordered an investigation. Witnesses said the bus lost control after being hit by a smaller ferry. —*PTI*

EU probes Snapchat's child safety failures

LONDON, 26 MARCH

European Union regulators are investigating Snapchat for concerns over insufficient measures to protect children from risks like child predators and criminal recruitment. EU's executive Commission announced a formal probe under the Digital Services Act, citing concerns that Snapchat's age verification system is inadequate. The platform requires users to be at least 13, but regulators believe the system fails to properly verify whether users are adults posing as minors. The EU suspects Snapchat isn't doing enough to prevent contact with harmful users or restrict access to content such as drugs or alcohol. The probe follows similar actions against TikTok, Meta, and four adult content sites—Pornhub, Stripchat, XNXX, and XVideos—accused of failing to safeguard children. —*PTI*

Tracy Kidder, Pulitzer-winning writer, dies at 80

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

Renowned author Tracy Kidder, known for turning unlikely subjects into bestsellers, has died aged 80. His publisher confirmed his passing, praising his storytelling gifts and curiosity. Kidder won a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for "The Soul of a New Machine" in 1981, about a computer company. He immersed himself in diverse worlds, authoring notable books like "Among Schoolchildren" (1989), about a Massachusetts classroom, and "Old Friends" (1993), exploring aging in America. His 2003 book "Mountains Beyond Mountains" detailed a doctor's work in Haiti, inspiring many. Kidder served in Vietnam and studied at Harvard and the University of Iowa. —*PTI*

NO PLANS TO NEGOTIATE WITH WASHINGTON: TEHRAN

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-27

Smoke rises from an Israeli airstrike that hit Zibbikin village as seen from Tyre city, Lebanon, —*PTI*

FM says US seeking talks is proof of defeat; Don asks Iran to get serious

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran has not engaged in talks with US to end the war, "and we do not plan on any negotiations".

Araghchi told state media on Wednesday that the US had tried to send messages through other nations, "but that is not a conversation nor a negotiation." He questioned the calls for negotiations, noting that US President Donald Trump previously called for Iran's "unconditional surrender".

"The fact that they are talking about negotiation now is exactly an admission of defeat," he said. Araghchi also dismissed the reliability of "international guarantees".

His comments came after the US sent a 15-point peace proposal to Iran through Pakistan. claimed that Iran wanted to negotiate as he said Washington was winning the war.

The 15-point proposal reportedly addressed sanctions relief, a rollback of Iran's nuclear programme, limits on missiles and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped. However, Iran sent back a five-point counterproposal, saying it wants to exercise "sovereignty" over the Strait.

Yet, white House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt insisted that the US and Iran are in ongoing talks. "They are productive," she said at a White House briefing on Wednesday. She refused to name who was negotiating on behalf of Iran.

She warned that if talks with Iran don't pan out President Donald Trump "will ensure they are hit harder than they have ever been hit before".

Leavitt also said that reports suggesting that talks of peace talks being held in Pakistan are "speculations".

Asked about notably silent Vice President JD Vance, , becoming a frontrunner for the negotiations, she said he had always been a part of the core team.

Meanwhile, Trump took to Truth Social and told Tehran to "get serious soon" on negotiations "before it is too late, because once that happens there is no turning back."

In another post, he lashed out at NATO again, saying that countries in the alliance have done nothing against the "lunatic nation", and said the US would not forget the lack of help. —*Agencies*

> **There's never been a head of a country that wanted that job less than being the head of Iran. They say, 'I don't want it... We'd like to make you (Trump) the next Supreme Leader.' (I say,) 'No, thank you. I don't want it'**
>
> —US President, Donald Trump

ISRAEL KILLED IRAN'S NAVY CHIEF: BIBI

JERUSALEM, 26 MARCH

Israel killed Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy chief **Alireza Tangsiri**, responsible for "leading the closure of the Strait of Hormuz," said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Iran has not confirmed the death, but US' CENTCOM also issued a statement, saying that he was killed.

"This individual has a great deal of blood on his hand", Netanyahu said in a video message, vowing that the strikes would continue.

Tangsiri's death, if confirmed, would further add to the growing list of senior Iranian officials assassinated during the war. —*Agencies*

Iran's Pasteur Institute, one of the oldest medical research centres in West Asia, was hit by Israeli-US strikes on Tehran on Thursday —*IRNA*

Six held for plotting to kill Kuwait leaders

Six people have been arrested for a plot to kill Kuwait leaders, the country's Ministry of Interior said. The arrested individuals were allegedly linked to the Iran-backed Hezbollah group, the ministry said, adding that they planned to carry out assassinations of other leaders in the Gulf state. Five of those arrested are Kuwaiti citizens.

Will not get 'sucked into' war: Germany

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius on Thursday described the Iran war as an economic "catastrophe" and said Germany did not want to get "sucked into" the conflict. Pistorius said Germany was ready to help secure any peace once that was achieved, noting that Germany hadn't been consulted before the strikes. "It's not our war."

GCC slams Iran's 'toll' to pass via Hormuz

RIYADH, 26 MARCH

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Jasem Mohamed al-Budaiwi said Iran was charging for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the first top official to accuse Tehran of doing so. He said it a breach of international law.

Al-Budaiwi oversees the bloc of six Gulf Arab nations including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

He spoke during a news conference on Thursday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

He also lashed out at Iran for turning the Gulf countries into "arenas for regional score-settling."

"Iran directed more than 85 percent of its attacks at Gulf countries," al-Budaiwi said

Earlier, Lloyd's List Intelligence said Iran was imposing "de facto toll booth" in the Strait.

"At least two vessels have and the payment is settled in (Chinese) yuan," Lloyd's List said.

'NATURAL TO PAY A FEE'

Iran's Fars and Tasnim news agencies quoted lawmaker Mohammadreza Rezaei Kouchi as saying that parliament was working to formalise a process to charge a fee.

"We provide its security, and it is natural that ships and oil tankers should pay such fees," he said. —*Agencies*

Drone damages Turkish-operated tanker in Black Sea

ISTANBUL/ MOSCOW, 26 MARCH

A Turkish-operated oil tanker that had departed from Russia was struck by a naval drone on Thursday as it approached the Bosporus Strait via the Black Sea, Turk officials said.

All 27 Turkish crew members of the Altura were unharmed in the attack which caused damage to the bridge and engine room. Authorities did not say whether Ukraine was behind the attack, but Kyiv has previously targeted ships in the Black Sea.

The vessel, the Altura, was travelling from the Russian city of Novorossiysk to Istanbul, according to the maritime tracking service Marinetraffic and was carrying 1,40,000 tonnes of crude oil when it was hit. Open Sanctions also reported links between the vessel and the Iranian regime under its previous ownership.

MOSCOW TO PROVIDE NAVAL ESCORTS

Moscow will provide naval escort to ships carrying Russian cargo following growing cases of Western navies intercepting such vessels, the Maritime Board of Russia said.

The guidelines primarily cover the Azov-Black Sea basin and the Baltic Sea region, but it was not clear whether the naval escort would be provided to other parts.

The decision comes as European nations have stepped up efforts to disrupt Russia's so-called shadow fleet, which is used by Moscow to deliver hydrocarbons to traditional customers India and China, as well as growing demand in Asia in the wake of the West Asia crisis. —*PTI*

Amid impasse, strikes in West Asia continue

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

With Iran and the US appearing at a diplomatic impasse on Thursday, strikes continue across West Asia. Iran outlasting Israeli-US onslaught could be seen as a victory.

Israel said it carried out a wave of attacks targeting Iranian infrastructure early on Thursday, and air defences were heard in Tehran.

Strikes were also reported around Isfahan, home to a Iran's bases, as well as a nuclear site.

Loud booms could be heard across Israel as it was repeatedly targeted by Iran.

Israel's Magen David Adom emergency service said a man in his 30s was killed in Nahariya.

Gulf countries also reported downing Iranian drones.

TEHRAN MINES KHARG ISLAND

With several US ships, including the USS Tripoli, with thousands of troops, drawing closer to the Gulf, Iran has reportedly begun laying mines on the Kharg island and has increased its ground presence on the island, fearing a ground invasion. Kharg Island handles around 90 per cent of Iran's crude oil.

HOUTHIS THREATEN TO JOIN WAR

The Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have again threatened to join the war by firing missiles into the Red Sea. When the Houthis began firing missiles during the Gaza war, they effectively closed off the Bab al-Mandab Strait, disrupting oil trade at the time. With the Strait of Hormuz currently closed, analysts fear this could further worsen the global economy.

> **Don't send your children to hell with the deceit of Netanyahu and Trump. The invading soldiers will be deeply drowned and disappear in the million-strong sea of the Iranian nation**
>
> —IRGC statement

LEBABON FEARS OCCUPATION

As Israel continued to trade fire with Hezbollah, its leaders called for mass evacuations and sent ground troops deeper into Lebanon. Israeli leaders have hinted at a long-term occupation, as the IDF continued to demolish buildings it said was terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon. —*Agencies*

MBS is with us: Trump as reports say Saudi wants war to continue

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

Saudi Crown Prince **Mohammed Bin Salman** is fighting with us, said President Donald Trump, after a report suggested that the Kingdom's de-facto ruler wanted US-Israel to continue striking Iran.

New York Times reported that the Salman has privately urged Trump to continue the war as it presented an opportunity for US and Israel to remake Middle East. Saudi officials reportedly told people in the White House that a sustained operations could dismantle the Iranian government, which Salman allegedly believes is a threat to the Gulf.

Asked by reporters at the Oval Office if Salman was asking the US to do "certain things", Trump said: "He does --he is a warrior. He is fighting with us, by the way".

NYT said, quoting American officials, that Salman has been pushing Trump to take over Kharg Island, which hosts most of Iran's oil facilities.

> **Enemies are preparing to occupy one of the Iranian islands with support from one of the regional countries. Our forces are monitoring all enemy movements, and if they take any step, all the vital infrastructure of that regional country will be targeted with relentless, unceasing attacks.**
>
> —Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker

The Pentagon has already deployed thousands more troops to the region, raising speculations about a possible ground invasion. —*Agencies*

EYES DISMISSAL OF US CHARGES

Maduro back in court over 'narco-terror' case

NEW YORK, 26 MARCH

Former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro returned to a New York courtroom on Thursday seeking to get his drug trafficking indictment thrown out, based on a geopolitical dispute over legal fees. This is the first time since January that Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, will appear in court.

Maduro's lawyer — Barry Pollack — contends that the US is violating the deposed leader's constitutional rights by blocking Venezuelan government funds from being used for legal costs. Maduro and Flores remain jailed in Brooklyn without bail. A trial date has not been set, although it could happen at the hearing.

Maduro's bid for a government-funded defence hinges on a reported "flip-flop" by the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Although OFAC approved Venezuelan funding on 9 January, the decision was rescinded hours later, leaving Maduro to claim he is unable to afford counsel.

Maduro and his wife are accused of ordering kidnappings, beatings, and murders tied to their drug operation. A 25-page indictment alleges they worked with cartels and military figures to traffic large amounts of cocaine into the US. If convicted, they face the possibility of life in prison.

Despite the United Socialist Party (PSUV)'s continued rule, Maduro is being sidelined by Acting President Delcy Rodríguez as Venezuela restores ties with the US. After years of severed relations, Washington has eased oil sanctions and dispatched a top diplomat to Caracas—yet this may not spare Maduro and Flores from footing their own legal bills. —*PTI*

This Thursday is the first time since January that ex Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, will appear in court —*x*

2 DEAD AS PAK & AFGHAN RESUME FIGHTING AS TRUCE ENDS

KABUL/ ISLAMABAD, 26 MARCH

Renewed fighting erupted along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan on Wednesday after a temporary ceasefire expired.

Pakistani forces fired dozens of artillery shells into the Narai and Sarkano districts, killing two civilians and wounding eight others, said Ziaur Rahman Speenghar, a Director at the Information and Culture Department in Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province.

Afghan border forces returned fire, he said, claiming they destroyed three Pakistani military posts and killed one person. His claims could not be independently verified and there was no immediate comment from Pakistan.

A local Pakistani official in the northwest accused Afghan forces of initiating the exchange of fire in multiple areas.

The brief truce had been announced by the two sides ahead of Eid ul-Fitr, shortly after Pakistani strikes allegedly killed 400 people in a drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul.

Separately, Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) said it resumed attacks after observing its own three-day Eid ceasefire. —*PTI*

—ANI

JSW Motors, Dassault partner for energy vehicles

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

JSW Motors announced on Thursday that it will collaborate with French-based platform Dassault Systemes as its core digital backbone for the upcoming New Energy Vehicles (NEVs). "We are building a technology-led future mobility ecosystem, which is engineered in India. We have partnered with Dassault Systemes to embed its digital platform across the vehicle lifecycle, from design to manufacturing at JSW Motors," said Ranjan Nayak, CEO, JSW Motors. By creating virtual twins of products and processes, Dassault Systemes aims to boost innovation, efficiency, agility, scalability, and long-term competitiveness, he added. By leveraging Dassault's 3DX platform, JSW Motors is localising product development and implementing a manufacturing execution system. —*PTI*

Bharat PET files draft papers for Rs 760 crore IPO

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Integrated packaging solutions provider Bharat PET Ltd filed its draft papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 760 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 120 crore and an offer for sale of shares worth up to Rs 640 crore by promoters. Proceeds include Rs 50 crore for debt repayment, Rs 35.8 crore for machinery, and the balance for general corporate purposes. The company may also consider a pre-IPO placement of securities aggregating up to Rs 24 crore. If undertaken, the size of the fresh issue will be reduced accordingly. The company's operations revenue is Rs 411.82 crore in FY25. —*PTI*

DGGI arrests 2 in Rs 177 crore GST fraud

MRAVATI, 26 MARCH

The Directorate General of Goods and Services Tax Intelligence (DGGI) as part of an intensified crackdown on organised GST evasion, has arrested two people linked to a large fake Input Tax Credit (ITC) racket of Rs 177 crore. Using data analytics and inter-agency collaboration, the enforcement aims to dismantle large-scale tax evasion syndicates and inter-state fraud networks. The arrests were made by DGGI's Visakhapatnam Zonal Unit in Hyderabad. The accused were identified as Siddagone Prabhaker and Ramavath Nagaraju Naik, who were allegedly operating 66 shell proprietorship firms as part of an organised GST evasion network. Another alleged mastermind, Aadi Reddy who goes by the alias Anji Reddy, is currently absconding, the DGGI release added. —*PTI*

IREDA declares interim dividend of Rs 0.06 per share

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Government-owned Indian Renewable Energy Dev Agency Ltd (IREDA) confirmed on Wednesday that its board has approved an interim dividend of Rs 0.60, or 6 per cent, per equity share with a face value of Rs 10 each, for the financial year 2025-26. IREDA Chairman and Managing Director Pradip Kumar Das said that the declaration of interim dividend reflects the company's consistent financial strength and commitment to delivering long-term value to shareholders. In an exchange filing, the company set 2 April as the record date to determine shareholder eligibility for the interim dividend. The company said the interim dividend will be paid to eligible investors within 30 days of the dividend declaration. —*PTI*

Freight surge, LPG crisis hit exports from East India

Freight costs for cargo rise 60-80%, exports down by 50%

KOLKATA, 26 MARCH

The West Asia crisis has pushed freight costs for Europe-bound cargo up by 60-80 per cent, with exports falling by 50 per cent for some exporters while hundreds of containers got stranded at Kolkata port.

Calcutta Customs House Agents Association (CCHAA) president Mannu Choudhary said that freight charges have risen by over 40 per cent due to rerouting through the African route, while war surcharges imposed by shipping lines have taken the total cost escalation to 70-80 per cent for shipments to Europe and the US.

Around 600 containers that had entered Kolkata port for loading were being returned to the city following last-minute cargo cancellations. Of these, around 400 have already been taken back, while the remaining 200 are in the process of being cleared.

A person carries an empty LPG cylinder to avail a refilled one amid the ongoing supply crunch in Bengaluru —*MOHAMMAD ASAD*

The LPG supply crunch was compounding production difficulties, as the fuel is used in the finishing process for certain manufactured goods.

The engineering goods industry, which had been expecting growth of 3 per cent to 3.5 per cent over the previous year, would now lose incremental exports.

Exporters were also unable to take advantage of the falling rupee due to disruptions in logistics and order execution.

On the government's relief measures, experts acknowledged the freight neutralisation scheme offering 50 per cent reimbursement but flagged a critical implementation gap.

Choudhary said the port trust and Concord have offered reduced tariffs, and weekly Customs Clearance Facilitation Committee meetings are being held at the Custom House with all stakeholders.

Perishable cargo from the eastern region along with engineering goods, textiles and medicines meant for export to Europe were worst affected. The Jawaharlal Nehru Customs House directed all shipping lines and non-vessel owning common carriers to pass on relief granted by the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority on reefer plug-in charges for eligible West Asia-bound containers that were stranded. —*PTI*

AMID FROZEN CRUDE PRICES

Nayara hikes petrol price by Rs 5/litre, diesel by Rs 3

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Nayara Energy, India's largest private fuel retailer, on Thursday raised petrol prices by Rs 5 per litre and diesel by Rs 3 a litre, passing on part of the recent surge in global oil prices to customers.

Fuel marketing companies in India have been under strain as retail petrol and diesel prices remained frozen despite a nearly 50 per cent surge in international oil prices since the West Asia conflict began.

Nayara Energy, which operates 6,967 of India's 102,075 petrol pumps.

Jio-bp, the fuel retailing joint venture of Reliance Industries and BP Plc that owns 2,185 outlets, has, however, so far not raised prices despite incurring heavy losses on sale of petrol and diesel.

State-owned fuel retailers, who control about 90 per cent of the market, continue to keep rates on freeze.

Sources said while Nayara, majority-owned by Russia's Rosneft, hiked petrol price by Rs 5 per litre and diesel by Rs 3, the effective rate increase differs from state to state depending on the incidence on local taxes like VAT. In some places, the increase is as high as Rs 5.30 per litre for petrol.

State-owned companes like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) last week hiked the price of premium or petrol price by Rs 2 per litre and the rate of bulk diesel sold to industrial users by about Rs 22 a litre. —*PTI*

Manager held for Rs 150 crore fraud in Panchkula's Kotak Bank

CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH

The Haryana Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (SVACB) has made its first arrest in connection with alleged discrepancies involving nearly Rs 150 crore in fixed deposit receipts (FDRs) of Panchkula Municipal Corporation at a Kotak Mahindra Bank branch.

Dileep Kumar Raghav, the bank's relationship manager at the time of the offence, was detained on Wednesday.

The official statement said, "Accused Dileep Kumar Raghav has been arrested in the Kotak Mahindra Bank case. He was the relationship manager in the bank at the time of commission of offence. He had sent false reports to Panchkula Municipal Corporation regarding the fixed deposits after conspiring with key accused."

The municipal body claims a mismatch of over Rs 150 crore in their official records versus the bank's records. Panchkula Municipal Commissioner Vinay Kumar stated, "The discrepancies detected in the Fixed Deposit Receipts were to the tune of Rs 150 crore."

A Kotak Mahindra Bank spokesperson asserted that the bank had conducted a detailed reconciliation and found that "accounts and transactions were handled in strict adherence to due process."

The FIR, filed on Tuesday night, charges unnamed bank officials with cheating, conspiracy, forgery, and related offences under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The FIR details that Vinay Kumar maintained 16 fixed deposits with over Rs 145 crore, with a maturity value of over Rs 158 crore. It claims that, as of 13 March, the bank's records show a balance of only Rs 2.17 crore, with the statement indicating Rs 12 crore, creating irregularities. —*PTI*

Centre asks states to fast-track exploration of minerals

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Centre on Wednesday directed all states to expedite ongoing exploration projects, ensure faster approvals and improve coordination to significantly reduce exploration-to-auction timelines.

Mines minister G Kishan Reddy also stressed the need to adopt advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, drone-based surveys and modern beneficiation techniques, to increase efficiency and success rates in mineral discovery.

The minister also stressed the greater inclusion of start-ups, private exploration agencies and innovation-driven institutions, in line with the vision of Startup India, to bring new ideas and cutting-edge solutions into the exploration ecosystem.

Reddy chaired the 7th governing body meeting of the National Mineral Exploration & Development Trust (NMEDT), held here in the august presence of Minister of State for the Department of Atomic Energy Jitendra Singh.

A total of 76 projects for critical mineral exploration have been sanctioned during 2025-26. So far, 45 NMEDT-funded blocks have been auctioned, including 10 blocks of critical minerals. There has also been a significant increase in private sector participation through several facilitating initiatives.

These reforms aim to strengthen India's mineral exploration framework, ensure the availability of critical minerals and accelerate project execution. —*PTI*

CBI searches Reliance ex-directors in Rs 114 cr SBI fraud

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The CBI has conducted raids at the homes of two former Reliance Telecom directors and the company's office after filing an FIR linked to an alleged fraud of Rs 114.98 crore involving the State Bank of India, officials confirmed on Thursday.

The CBI stated that it has registered a case against Reliance Telecom Ltd., Satish Seth (former Director), Gautam B Doshi (former Director), unidentified public servants, and others for conspiracy, cheating under IPC, criminal misconduct, and abuse of official position under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

The agency acted on a complaint from SBI, which reported being defrauded and suffered a wrongful loss of Rs 114.98 crore.

The agency said, "SBI was a member of the consortium of 11 banks which had sanctioned a total of Rs 735 crore Term Loan facility to Reliance Telecom Ltd."

Raids were carried out in Mumbai at the residences of Satish Seth, Gautam B Doshi, and the company's registered office.

Various documents connected with the loan transactions have been recovered, the spokesperson added. —*PTI*

India probes Chinese, Indonesian paperboards

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

India has initiated a probe into imports of subsidised Chinese and Indonesian paperboards, as these are allegedly impacting domestic players, according to a notification.

The commerce ministry's investigation arm, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), has started the exercise following a complaint filed by the Indian Paper Manufacturers' Association on behalf of the domestic industry.

The applicant has alleged that exports of multi-layer paperboards by Chinese and Indonesian firms, which are subsidised by their respective governments, are hurting margins of Indian companies.

They have requested initiation of an anti-subsidy or countervailing investigation on imports of boards originating in or exported from these two countries.

The applicant has alleged that producers/exporters benefit from subsidies such as grants, loans, guarantees, taxes, export credits, goods and services, or equity infusions.

- The applicant alleged that exports of sunsidised multi-layer paperboards by Chinese and Indonesian firms hurt margins of Indian companies.

"On the basis of the duly substantiated written application... the authority hereby initiates an investigation," the DGTR said. It will determine the existence, degree and effect of subsidisation. DGTR has initiated sunset reviews of anti-dumping duties on certain steel and aluminium imports from China. —*PTI*

Airlines are facing big challenges, says DGCA chief

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is trying to promote ease of doing business for airlines to help them grow and flourish as well as taking steps for passenger rights, its chief Faiz Ahmed Kidwai said on Thursday.

There are big challenges for airlines, including taking longer routes and higher operational costs due to airspace restrictions, he said, expressing hope that there would be "better days".

The ongoing West Asia conflict is posing more challenges for airlines, which have curtailed services to the region.

He said many airlines have gone bust in India and emphasised the need to support carriers.

India is one of the world's fastest-growing civil aviation markets and the DGCA as well as the civil aviation ministry have been taking various initiatives.

Recently, it was decided that 60 per cent of seats in a domestic flight will be offered without any additional charges while the fare cap, which was imposed in the wake of IndiGo operational disruptions that happened in December 2025, has been withdrawn.

Also, carrying more fuel means less cargo and passengers so it hits revenues, he added. —*PTI*

DGCA RAPS AI FOR SENDING WRONG PLANE TO VANCOUVER

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has instructed Air India to implement corrective actions following the deployment of the wrong aircraft for a flight to Vancouver last week, a senior official confirmed on Thursday.

Action has also been taken against an airline official involved in the incident, the DGCA official said.

The Vancouver-bound Air India Boeing 777-200 LR, after being airborne for over seven hours, returned to Delhi on 19 March after it was discovered that the aircraft was not approved for operating the flight. Only Boeing 777-300 ER aircraft are authorised for that route.

The DGCA had requested a report from the airline following the incident. —*PTI*

POWER EMISSION FELL BY 3.8%

India's CO2 emission hits two-decades low in 2025

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

India's carbon dioxide emissions grew in 2025 at the slowest rate in more than two decades, according to an analysis by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

Emissions in the power sector fell by 3.8 per cent as record clean-energy growth combined with weak electricity demand. Also, consumption of imported coal at power plants fell by 20 per cent in 2025.

India's carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions grew by 0.5 per cent in the second half of 2025 and by just 0.7 per cent in the year.

According to Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at CREA, the analysis shows that India's power sector is poised for a potential inflection point, where clean-energy additions can meet or exceed the growth in electricity demand.

- India's carbon emissions have been growing rapidly for decades, with annual increases averaging 4.9 pc per year since 1990 and 4-11 per cent during 2021-24.

If clean energy matches expectations, allowing this inflection point to take place, then coal-fired power output and the associated CO2 emissions would see sustained falls.

India's carbon emissions have been growing rapidly for decades, with annual increases averaging 4.9 pc per year since 1990 and 4-11 per cent during 2021-24.

Across the sectors, the reductions and weak growth in fossil-fuel consumption eased India's vulnerability to the recent price and supply disruptions taking place in the wake of the West Asia conflict.

India's fossil-fuel imports were disproportionately affected by falling demand overall. Consumption of imported coal at power plants fell by 20 pc in 2025.

First, the country added 47 gigawatts (GW) of solar, 6.3GW of wind, 4.0GW of hydropower and 0.6GW of nuclear power in 2025.The largest reductions in coal-fired power generation took place in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan. —*PTI*

WazirX launches zero brokerage for crypto trading

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Crypto exchange WazirX introduced a flat-fee subscription model with its platform restart, aimed at reducing trading costs for retail investors, as digital asset adoption accelerates in India.

The platform's 'ZERO' plan replaces traditional percentage-based brokerage fees with a fixed monthly charge of Rs 99, allowing users to execute unlimited trades for zero-fee across more than 300 tokens.

Crypto exchanges typically charge users up to 0.5 per cent per transaction, costs that can compound significantly for frequent traders. For instance, a user trading Rs 10,000 ten times a month could incur annual costs of nearly Rs 25,000 when factoring in brokerage fees. In addition, there's a 1 per cent tax deducted at source (TDS) on crypto transactions, which get added to the trading fees.

Founder Nischal Shetty said the model was designed to rethink how exchanges serve retail participants by shifting revenue generation from transaction-based fees to subscriptions.

While exchanges must continue to comply with regulatory requirements such as TDS, industry participants say pricing innovations could improve accessibility for smaller investors by simplifying cost structures and enhancing transparency.

The move comes as competition intensifies in India's crypto market. —*PTI*

FRESH TALENT takes centre stage at IPL 2026

A look at 10 promising newcomers

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Last year, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre grabbed attention in their debut IPL season. This year, fans can expect more rookies aiming to justify the tournament tagline: "Where Talent Meets Opportunity."

Here's a look at one promising newcomer from each of the 10 franchises who could shine in the next eight weeks. The list includes Indian and international players who are yet to debut in IPL or have played fewer than five matches.

Delhi Capitals – Auqib Nabi:
At 29, the 'Baramullah Express' made headlines with 60 wickets in Ranji Trophy last season. Known for his big-match temperament, Nabi's IPL debut will test his ability to handle top-order batters despite bowling in the early 130s.

Gujarat Titans – Ashok Sharma
One of India's fastest young pacers, the 23-year-old, has yet to play an IPL game despite being with Rajasthan Royals. Clocking 150 kmph in SMAT, Sharma could serve as a backup to Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, and Rabada.

Chennai Super Kings – Prashant Veer:
The 20-year-old left-arm spinner and left-handed batter from Amethi was snapped up for Rs 14.20 crore. With just nine SMAT games but an impressive 6.45 economy and 167+ batting strike-rate, Veer could fill the void left by Ravindra Jadeja.

Kolkata Knight Riders – Tejasvi Dahiya
A Delhi-born 23-year-old, Dahiya impressed in SMAT with a half-century and a 168 strike-rate. Positioned as a middle-order batter, he could develop into a key player under coach Abhishek Nayar.

Lucknow Super Giants – Naman Tiwari
The 20-year-old left-arm pacer, known for 140+ kmph deliveries, shone in the 2024 UP T20 league. A U-19 World Cup standout, Tiwari could be a valuable backup for LSG.

Mumbai Indians – Allah Ghazanfar
The 20-year-old Afghan mystery spinner was set to play for KKR last season but opted out. MI's coaching staff may use him as one of four overseas options.

Punjab Kings – Mitchell Owen
The 24-year-old Tasmanian has a reputation for big-hitting in the Big Bash League, striking at 180+. Owen can also contribute with medium-pace overs, adding balance to PBKS.

Rajasthan Royals – Ravi Singh
Singh's 218 runs at 173 strike-rate in SMAT last year, including a 38-ball 68 against Vidarbha, earned him a Rs 95 lakh deal. The 24- year-old batter could prove a game-changer in the middle order.

Sunrisers Hyderabad – Shivang Kumar
The 23-year-old left-arm wrist spinner from Madhya Pradesh is a rare find. A handy lower-order batter, his IPL debut will depend on SRH head coach Daniel Vettori's plans.

Royal Challengers Bangalore – Jacob Bethell
The 22-year-old impressed with a half-century in IPL last year and a T20 World Cup semi-final century against India. Bethell's power-hitting could trouble bowlers on fast Chinnaswamy pitches.

2nd phase of IPL to be held from 13 April to 24 May

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The second phase of the IPL 2026 will begin on 13 April and conclude on 24 May, the BCCI announced on Thursday while releasing the full fixtures of the league phase.

The first phase runs from 28 March to 12 April, with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Sunrisers Hyderabad facing off in the league opener at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday. The final is slated for May 31 in Bengaluru.

"The remainder of the league stage, comprising 50 matches, will be played across 12 venues in India," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said.

"Matches in the second phase will be held in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jaipur, Dharamshala, Raipur and New Chandigarh," he added.

"As the tournament enters a crucial phase, teams will compete across venues for a place in the playoffs, with the race expected to intensify through the latter half of the league stage." The action resumes on 13 April with Sunrisers Hyderabad taking on Rajasthan Royals in Hyderabad, setting the tone for an exciting run of fixtures. The second phase will feature eight double-headers.

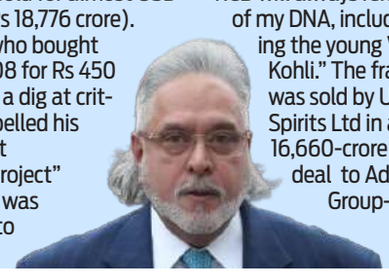
Punjab Kings will play their home matches in New Chandigarh and Dharamshala, including three games at the latter venue during this phase.

Rajasthan Royals will host four home games in Jaipur, while RCB will play three home matches in Bengaluru and two in Raipur. —*PTI*

'When I bought RCB, people laughed at me

Fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya, the original owner of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), congratulated the new owners after the cricket franchise was sold for almost USD 2 billion (Rs 18,776 crore).

Mallya, who bought RCB in 2008 for Rs 450 crore, took a dig at critics who labelled his investment a "vanity project" and said it was gratifying to see his stake grow to Rs 16,660 crore. In an X post, he wrote, "Behind my much touted madness was building the Royal Challenge brand... RCB will always remain part of my DNA, including picking the young Virat Kohli." The franchise was sold by United Spirits Ltd in a Rs 16,660-crore all-cash deal to Aditya Birla Group-led group.



Guwahati to host Border-Gavaskar Test

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Having hosted a Test match against South Africa in late November, Guwahati's Barsapara Stadium is once again among the five venues that will host the marquee series between India and Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, the BCCI announced on Thursday.

The Indian board released the calendar for senior men's team's home season which will comprise of five Tests, nine ODIs and eight T20Is. The ODI matches will certainly have a premium attached to it with the legendary white ball duo of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma expected to feature in all of them.

Among the five venues, as per rotation, Nagpur (last hosted Test in vs Australia 2023), Chennai (last hosted Test vs Bangladesh in 2024), Ranchi (last hosted Test vs England in 2024) have all got their due games. Ahmedabad hosted a Test match against the West Indies in October, 2025.

The Indian board released the calendar for senior men's team's home season which will comprise of five Tests, nine ODIs and eight T20Is —*PTI*

However, it wasn't clear as to how Guwahati, which hosted India's last home Test series (vs South Africa in November 2025) again features in rotation while Mumbai and Kolkata are not part of the marquee series. It is not known whether Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) or Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) didn't want to host a Test versus Australia.

The series will start with the opening Test in Nagpur from 21 January followed by Chennai (29 January -2 February) with the third Test in Guwahati from 11 to 15 February after an eight-day gap.

The fourth Test in Ranchi will be played between 19- 23 February, while the final Test in Ahmedabad will commence from 27 February. —*PTI*

GOVT SAYS, 'SHOW US WHY?'

Asian Games sees high demand for personal coaches

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Facing a surge in requests for personal coaches in India's Asian Games contingent, the Sports Ministry has mandated that only coaches with "demonstrable contribution" and a "regular association" with athletes will be considered for inclusion.

The Games are scheduled from 19 September to 4 October in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, with India expected to field over 700 athletes. Support staff cannot exceed 33 per cent of the total contingent, as per Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) regulations.

At the 170th Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) meeting, concerns were raised over requests for personal coaches that, in some cases, equal or exceed athlete numbers. Sources noted instances where new coaches travelled with athletes despite training being overseen by others in preceding months.

The ministry's guidelines, issued last September, state that only athletes with a "real chance of winning medals" will be considered, based on continental rankings — top-six in individual events and top-eight in team sports. Selection of coaches and support staff must follow performance-linked criteria, align with international accreditation norms, and remain stable throughout the Games to ensure continuity in athlete preparation.

National Sports Federations (NSFs) will continue to appoint coaches, but all nominations must be routed through a committee with representatives from the Sports Authority of India and eminent sportspersons. Only individuals consistently involved in national camps and with clean records, free from doping or safe sport violations, will be eligible. Last edition, India had 655 athletes supported by 260 coaches and staff.

MINISTRY TO COVER NEERAJ CHOPRA'S PHYSIO COSTS

Following the end of Neeraj Chopra's decade-long partnership with JSW Sports, the Sports Ministry has stepped in to cover his long-time physio, Ishaan Marwaha. Chopra, training in South Africa with new coach Jai Chaudhary and Marwaha, has been granted an extended stay in Pretoria till April. The two-time Olympic medallist is set to begin his season at the Doha Diamond League in May. —*PTI*

I have unfinished business at Asian Games: Mirabai

RAIPUR, 26 MARCH

Mirabai Chanu, the Tokyo Olympics silver medallist, considers winning an Asian Games medal "unfinished business," highlighting its importance after a decade of representing India. Her career includes a Tokyo silver, three World Championship medals, and three Commonwealth podiums, but the Asian Games medal remains elusive. She finished ninth in 2014, missed 2018 due to injury, and narrowly missed a medal in 2022 because of a hip injury. At 31, she hopes this could be her last appearance, aiming for her missing medal. She plans to compete in 48kg at Commonwealth Games and 49kg at Asian Games, adjusting her weight accordingly. Chanu praised the Khelo India Tribal Games as a platform for athletes from remote regions . —*PTI*

FIFA announces final phase of World Cup ticket sales

LONDON, 26 MARCH

FIFA revealed plans for a final round of ticket sales for the upcoming World Cup, scheduled from 11 June to 19 July. Over one million tickets had been sold by February's end, with additional tickets available from 1 April until the tournament's conclusion. FIFA President Gianni Infantino said demand was "the equivalent of 1,000 years of World Cups at once," ensuring all 104 matches would be sold out. The organisation faced criticism over ticket prices, ranging from $140 to $8,680 for the final, with fans accusing FIFA of a "monumental betrayal" and criticising the use of "dynamic pricing." Remaining tickets will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis, allowing fans to select specific seats from 1 April. —*PTI*

India excels in Compound Archery at Asia Cup

BANGKOK, 26 MARCH

India's compound archers continue to dominate, with top-seeded mixed team pair Rajat Chauhan and Chikitha Taniparthi advancing to the final after impressive wins. They defeated Chinese Taipei 159-155 and Kazakhstan 157-153, dropping only four points across 32 arrows, securing their sixth medal overall. India already has two bronze medals and five finalists, with two more bronzes possible, aiming to surpass last year's total of eight medals.

However, India's recurve team, led by Ruma Biswas and Devaang Gupta, faced disappointment, suffering a straight-set defeat to Vietnam's Thi Dao Loc and Hoang Phi Vu Nguyen in the quarterfinals. After losing the first set 35-37, India improved to 36 but trailed, with Vietnam sealing victory by dropping just one point in the third set. The recurve team had previously won silver in the mixed event, but this time failed to defend individual titles and returned empty-handed.

Overall, India is in finals across five categories, including women's recurve individual, men's recurve team, women's compound team, mixed compound team, and men's compound individual. Prathamesh Jawkar and Uday Kamboj will compete in the men's compound final, while Ridhi Phor aims for her first international individual gold. India's medals include two bronze medals won on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Gulveer to lead 18th TCS World 10K in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Reigning Asian champion and national record holder Gulveer Singh will spearhead India's challenge at the 18th edition of the TCS World 10K Run in Bengaluru, a World Athletics Gold Label race, on Sunday. He arrives in top form after finishing third at the New York City Half Marathon with a national-best 59:42.

The race offers a total prize purse of USD 210,000, with USD 26,000 for winners. Gulveer, who holds national records in the 10,000m and 5,000m, enjoyed a stellar 2025 season, winning both events at the Asian Championships and setting a record at the Tata Steel World 25K Kolkata. —*PTI*

B'LURU FC APPOINT SPANIARD MUNOZ AS HEAD COACH

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Bengaluru FC announced on Thursday the appointment of Pep Muñoz as head coach until the end of the 2026-27 season, as the club aims to remain competitive. Muñoz has previously worked with FC Barcelona's youth teams, including Barca U19 and Barcelona B, and has coaching experience in China with Qingdao Huanghai and Shandong Luneng, as well as with the Chinese national team.

His first head coach role was at Cambodia's Preah Khan Reach Svay Rieng, where he led the club to two league titles, one League Cup victory, and reached the AFC Challenge League final. Muñoz expressed enthusiasm, saying, "The decision to join Bengaluru FC was an easy one. It is a model club in Indian football. I have only heard very positive things from my fellow Spanish compatriots who have been or are in India about the club, the city, and the supporters."

He added, "The season is different, but the team is improving weekly. My role now is to help the players continue that progress. I would like to see a proactive, ambitious, and confident team with a clear attacking and pressing strategy." Club owner Parth Jindal commented, "Pep's appointment reflects our belief in building with patience and purpose." —*PTI*

NEW NORMS KICK IN

IOC bans trans women from Olympics

GENEVA, 26 MARCH

Transgender women athletes will be excluded from women's events at the Olympics under a new policy announced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Thursday. The eligibility rules, effective from the 2028 Los Angeles Games, limit participation in female categories to biological females, determined by a mandatory gene test once in an athlete's career.

The IOC said the policy protects fairness, safety, and integrity in women's sports. It is not retroactive and does not apply to grassroots or recreational programmes. The policy also restricts female athletes with differences in sex development (DSD), such as runner Caster Semenya.

The IOC said the policy protects fairness, safety, and integrity in women's sports —*IOC MEDIA*

IOC President Kirsty Coventry, the first woman to lead the organisation, said biological males have physical advantages, including testosterone peaks in utero, infancy, and puberty, which affect strength, power, and endurance. The SRY gene test, detecting the presence of testes, was deemed the most accurate and least intrusive method available.

No transgender woman competed at the 2024 Paris Olympics, though Laurel Hubbard did in Tokyo 2021. Some sports, including track and field, swimming, and cycling, had already barred transgender women post-puberty.

The move aligns with U.S. President Donald Trump's 2025 executive order, "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports," which threatened visa denials and funding cuts for organisations allowing transgender participation.

While the policy addresses elite competitions, it may face criticism from human rights experts and activists. The IOC said it aims for a clear, consistent framework rather than leaving rules to individual sports bodies, ensuring fairness at the Olympic level. —*PTI*

Atiqa finishes stellar WSK as highest-ranked female

FRANCIACORTA, 26 MARCH

Indian racing prodigy Atiqa Mir capped off a stellar stint in the WSK Super Masters with a commendable eighth place finish out of 53 drivers in the final of Round 5, ending her campaign in the premier karting series as the highest-ranked female.

Making a big voluntary switch from the mini (age 8-12) to junior category (12-14) at the start of 2026, the 11-year-old demonstrated her special talent all through the five-round series.

Racing in the OK-NJ class, the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 Academy, Atiqa collected one podium, two fastest laps, eight top-6 finishes and a sizzling P2 finish in one of the qualifying sessions over the course of the WSK championship and European leg of the COTFA series. Besides being the highest-ranked female in the WSK series, she was also the best Indian driver.

Reflecting on her WSK campaign, Atiqa said, "I'm so grateful that I got the opportunity to drive in such prestigious series. I have been karting non-stop for the last 8 weeks at a very high level and have been able to adjust and adapt to so many firsts. I've learnt a lot and am a better driver today than when I started in January. I was having my best race weekend here at Franciacorta till this driver pushed me off the track and he got a penalty for that." —*PTI*